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BIBLE HISTORY: GENESIS TO ESTHER

By ANDREW W. BLACKWOOD

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ELIJAH TO CHRIST

"As we read we realize as never before the force of the appeal, we find that these records of the Bible are not a mass of dry bones, lifeless remains of a civilization which is dead and ought to be forgotten, but reports fresh from the battlefield where mighty heroes engaged in a life and death struggle to save their friends and nation from destruction. And all the time the author makes us feel that a lesson comes to us from those faraway days. No one can read it without profit."

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Bible History:

GENESIS TO ESTHER

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POPULAR STUDIES IN OLD
TESTAMENT HISTORY

By

ANDREW W. BLACKWOOD 1882 -

*Professor of English Bible, Presbyterian
Theological Seminary, Louis-
ville, Kentucky*

Illustrated by Original Charts



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FOREWORD

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THESE studies are intended for use in home and church, in school and college, and wherever busy folk wish to gain a working knowledge of the English Bible as it stands. The aim is to introduce such busy laymen to the abiding religious values of the historical books of the Old Testament, from the conservative point of view.

The unit of study here is the individual book, for the Bible was written book by book. In our English Bible these historical books are arranged according to the sequence of the events which they narrate, and so the present volume takes up these books, one by one, and traces in them the gradual unfolding of the promises of the Covenant, which found its fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

Busy folk who have worked in this field have long felt the need of a volume dealing with these early portions of the Bible in a popular way, ignoring critical questions, and making these books seem almost as attractive as they really are. Such a volume should give due place to "human nature in the Bible," but it should give much more prominence to divine grace, and it should indicate the bearing of these inspired teachings on the practical problems of life today.

The value of such a course depends largely on the student's diligence in searching the Scriptures, and so the various chapters here should be employed as guides

in the study of the Word of God, and not as substitutes for the corresponding books in the Bible. To encourage the student to think for himself, certain practical suggestions for review and for discussion are appended to the various chapters, as well as lists of memorable passages in each book; and original charts are employed wherever they appear to be needed.

In quest of truth and light, the author has gone to many different volumes, and the best of them have sent him back to the Bible. For counsel and help he has gone to a number of his graduate students, notably the Rev. F. W. A. Bosch, as well as to his colleague and friend, Professor Jesse L. Cotton, beloved teacher of the Old Testament. But for the volume itself the writer alone is responsible, and in commending it to busy laymen he hopes that it will increase their love for the written Word of God and their loyalty to the living Christ.

A. W. B.

Louisville, Kentucky.

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I

GENESIS: RELIGION IN THE HOME

THIS first book in the Bible goes back to the beginning of all things, but it has to do chiefly with God and the home. Throughout the book God deals with men and women, not primarily as individuals, but rather as partners in building up the godly home, from which in the fulness of time the Redeemer of the world was to be born. Surely it is no accident that the first book in the Bible, and one of the greatest, deals so largely with religion as it concerns the most important of earthly institutions, the home.

The first eleven chapters of Genesis recount something of the early history of the human race, but largely as an introduction to the record concerning the chosen family, which held the only hope for the world. The remaining chapters relate the experiences of this one family, so that to the very end of the book there is among the people of God no organized government, and no organized church, other than in this patriarchal household. One great purpose of the book, therefore, is to reveal Jehovah as the Covenant God of the Hebrew family.

The striking unity of Genesis is due in large measure to the prominence of the Covenant, which Jehovah made with one man after another, not primarily for himself, but for his "seed." Here, for example, is the

promise to Abraham: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." This Covenant was Jehovah's way of revealing to His people His gracious purpose to be their God. In making the Covenant He always took the initiative, but still the Covenant was not complete until it was accepted by His children. The modern word for such a divine initiative and such a human response is loyalty: God was ever loyal to His people, and He expected His people ever to be loyal to Him, especially in the home.

Since the history of redemption is largely the record of the unfolding of the purposes of God through this one family, the Book of Genesis follows out the fortunes of other interesting folk only as far as necessary for an understanding of religion in the Hebrew home. From this point of view the book falls into five parts, which overlap somewhat. Within each of these five parts the structure is fairly uniform, because the book records household experiences which were much the same from generation to generation. Prosperity led to sin; sin brought on suffering; suffering induced penitence; penitence brought forgiveness, and forgiveness led to joy. Such is the cycle of events on many a page in Genesis, but back of such a cycle is the Covenant God, standing in the shadow, keeping watch above the home.

I. The God of the Early Fathers (Gen. 1-11)

The principal character here is God. "The man who cannot hear God speak to him in the story of the creation and the fall, will never hear God's voice anywhere." These chapters tell of "God's creative wisdom and power, of man's native kinship with God, of man's

ruling over nature, of sin, and of God's judgment and mercy" (Denney). In Genesis these facts shine forth in the actual experiences of human beings like ourselves. If at times certain of those fathers and mothers seem remote and shadowy, we must remember that these chapters were written primarily to reveal certain facts about God.

In reading about the creation, therefore, we should place the emphasis where the inspired record places it, not upon the time, nor even upon the manner, in detail, but upon the fact that God made the world, and that He made it for man and woman as their home. From the very beginning He was preparing for them an ideal abode, and so He revealed His love by making everything good. Before He planted the family tree in the garden, He had prepared the soil, that the tree might bring forth perfect fruit.

The keynotes of these early chapters about God are unity, order and progress, as well as power, wisdom and glory. The modern name for such a God is the "Supernatural;" He is the absolute Ruler of the universe which He once made, and of ourselves as His handiwork. Do we really believe that God made the universe, and all that is in it, including ourselves? If so, we shall find no insuperable difficulty in believing all that the Bible records about His miraculous works.

The crowning glory of the entire creation was man, whom God made in His own image. Man is a person, a spiritual being, somewhat as God, the ideal Person, is Spirit. Man has powers and graces like those of God Himself, and he is to rule over the earth, as well as all over its creatures. Man, too, is a social being, for God made man and woman to live together in the home, in

the spirit of love and peace, with joys like those of heaven. Such is the ideal set before us in Genesis.

Thus in the very beginning the Bible exalts the marriage of one man with one woman, as equals. The words in Genesis (2:24) afforded the Lord Jesus a fitting reply to the question of the Pharisees about divorce. "What therefore God hath joined together let not man put asunder" (Matt. 19:6). Whenever the Master beheld a household blasted by sin He must have contrasted it with that original home life in which a man and a woman made in the image of God lived together in holy love, in a beautiful garden which even Milton has failed to describe.

But sin quickly entered that home, to rob it of peace and joy. As a study in the psychology of temptation and sin this third chapter of Genesis is unrivalled, and the picture is doubly impressive because it is taken from life. First the tempter suggests to Eve doubts concerning God, and then he appeals to her through "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life." So at length he persuades her to eat of the forbidden fruit, and then she gives her husband to eat. Thus the temptation blossoms out into sin. Is it any wonder that such a tempter is the hero in Milton's *Paradise Lost*?

Here are the beginnings of sin. But what is sin? It is the opposite of religion. Religion, ideally, is the right relation between God and a man, resulting in right relations between him and other men, and enabling him to make the most of himself as a child of God and a servant of men. Sin is the wrong relation between a man and God, resulting in the wrong relation between him and everyone else, and preventing him from making the

most of himself. Sin always originates with man, just as religion always originates with God. If there were no sin, this would be an ideal world, for God's will would be done as it is in heaven.

Another vital fact here in Genesis is conscience. Conscience is that God-given power which shows a man the right from the wrong, impels him to do the right and not the wrong, and approves him when he has done the right, but condemns him when he has done the wrong. Conscience is a fact of daily experience, and it operates in us now as it did yonder in Adam and Eve. After they had sinned they were afraid, and in their new shame they tried to hide themselves from God. When they found that they could not escape from His presence, first the one and then the other strove to shift the responsibility for sin. Such were the simple beginnings of sin's endless chain.

Thus Adam and Eve lost their home, the first but not the last fair home to be lost because of sin. Then followed other losses even worse, for the household which was to have been an earthly paradise began to be filled with hardships and woes. But in all of their sufferings the heart of God was suffering, too, and so He promised to provide them a way to escape from sin. This promise (3:15) found its fulfilment in the Messiah, Who came out from that home. For in the home religion shines forth at its brightest.

The sins of our first parents, meanwhile, were being visited upon their children. Whatsoever a man and a woman sow in their home, they are almost certain to reap in their children. Cain slew his brother Abel, and when conscience began to gnaw at Cain's heart, he exclaimed, "Am I my brother's keeper?" No, Cain,

you are not, and so the voice of your brother's blood will keep on crying out from the ground, though you flee to the ends of the earth! What a warning to parents today!

As the children of men multiplied, so did their sins. In the long procession which files before us here (Gen. 5), only one man, Enoch, is singled out because of his goodness. The more God blessed mankind, the more corrupt they became, especially in their homes. But one household stood out as less corrupt than the rest. From our Christian point of view Noah and his family were far from saintly, but over against the black background of their own times they deserved to be known as righteous.

In the record of the Flood the word Covenant first appears (6:18), to explain why Noah and his household were spared. Since the purpose of the Flood was primarily constructive, we should think more about the family which survived, than about the throngs which perished; and more about the purpose of God as symbolized in the rainbow (8:22 and 9:13), than about the dimensions of the ark and the number of beasts which it contained. First things first! (For the rainbow as a symbol of hope, see Wordsworth's sonnet, "My heart leaps up," and Matheson's hymn, "O love that wilt not let me go.")

After the Flood the sordidness of human nature appeared in the drunkenness of Noah and the impurity of his son, two sins which often go together, to make many a home almost a hell. Yet out of such a household God was slowly fashioning the family type through which He would bless the world. Meanwhile He wished to keep that family type intact, and so we have the

narrative about Babel (Gen. 11). The problem yonder was the reverse of that in our American cities, with their confusion of tongues, for our immigrants persist in using their mother tongues, and so they rarely become assimilated. Would that their separateness might result in such a family type as that which gradually emerged after Babel; for under God that separate existence made possible the birth of Abraham.

II. The God of Abraham, the Pioneer (Gen. 12-24)

Abraham is the greatest man in Genesis. His name was originally Abram, "Exalted Father," of which Abraham is the heightened form. He represents the melancholic temperament, and is notable for dignity, for intensity and for practical idealism. The principal character here, however, is not Abram, but God. No man is too great to be the humble servant of God, and in that service Abram found his chief delight.

Abram was a pioneer. When he was called of God to go out from Mesopotamia he received the promise of the Covenant in a seven-fold form (12:1-3). When he arrived in Canaan he learned that these promises were to be fulfilled in his offspring, as yet unborn. Meanwhile, wherever he encamped, "He builded an altar and called upon the name of his God." But he made serious mistakes: when famine visited Canaan, as it often did, he removed his household to Egypt, and there he lied in order to save his wife from dishonour. But even when he sinned, Abram was a lover of his home.

During these years Abram had with him Lot, his nephew. After the return to Canaan the herdsmen of

Abram and of Lot began to quarrel, because there was not sufficient pasturage for their flocks and herds when feeding together. When Abram generously offered his nephew the choice of the hill country or the valley, Lot selfishly chose the valley, because it was well watered. Soon he was living in Sodom, the vilest city in the ancient world. He was not the last farmer who has moved to town for selfish reasons, thereby bringing upon his household ruin and shame.

Abram was a man of peace, but he was willing to fight for those whom he loved (Gen. 14). When four petty kings from the East swooped down into the plain and defeated the five kings there, carrying away captive Lot and all that he had, Abram rallied his young men, pursued the foe and rescued his nephew, doubtless by an attack as unexpected as it was bold. Abram showed his unselfishness by refusing to take for himself or his followers any of the spoils of war, but on the way home he met Melchizedec, to whom he gave tithes. This entire passage illustrates many of the principles of righteous warfare.

Under the promises of the Covenant Abram was to be a father, but he and Sarai were growing old, and they were childless; so Sarai suggested that he take as his second wife, or concubine, her handmaid, Hagar. Here again he acted without divine leading; hence there was trouble in the home, especially after Hagar gave birth to Ishmael. So in Africa today, polygamy causes jealousies and intrigues, and brings endless suffering, especially to the child of the less-favoured wife.

Despite his failings, Abram was a strong, good man. As a proof of divine favour, his name was changed to Abraham, and he was told that Sodom was about to be

destroyed (Gen. 18). Abraham prayed for that wicked city, but not even his prayers could avert its doom. He was the means, however, of saving Lot and all of Lot's household, except his wife. They had shared in a measure the corruption of the city, and they lost their worldly goods, forfeiting the wealth for which they had almost sold their souls.

Years later, after Isaac had been born and had grown almost to manhood, God told Abraham to take his beloved son to a distant mountain and to offer him there as a living sacrifice. Although he knew that Isaac was the child of promise, and that he would never have another heir, Abraham started out at once, made the three-days' journey, and completed his preparations to slay his son. But when his hand was uplifted to strike, he was stayed by the voice of an angel. This passage, with its triumph of faith, illustrates the difference between trial, which comes from God, and temptation, which comes from the devil; and it shows how the Hebrews learned never to offer a human sacrifice.

The chief characteristic of Abraham was his faith; hence he is enrolled high among the immortals in the Epistle to the Hebrews. His faith was intensely practical; it was serving faith, as well as "saving faith." It meant doing the will of God, day by day, gladly and well, not because he understood why, but because he trusted God. It meant giving up practically all that the world counts dear, and going out into the wilderness, somewhat as a ship might sail to the ends of the ocean under sealed orders. It meant courage to begin doing the will of God, perseverance to keep on, at any cost, and obedience to make the supreme sacrifice.

Abraham's faith shone out most brightly through his fatherhood. Long before he became a father he yearned for that privilege, and all the more because he knew that the blessings of the Covenant were to be given to the world through his seed. Thus early the Hebrews learned to think of faith and of fatherhood as inseparably united in building up a godly home. (Study 18:17-19 as an inspired description of a worthy father.)

The faith of this father has brought courage and strength to many a downcast soul. For example, at the Immigration Sheds in Winnipeg the late James Robertson, founder of Presbyterianism in Western Canada, once preached to Scotch pioneers about God's blessing upon Abraham as he fared forth into the wilderness. Years later, in one of the newer provinces he was entertained in a prosperous farmstead, surrounded by great barns and fertile fields, and there he learned that the change in the fortunes of that family had dated from the hour when that husband and wife, with their two little bairns, had listened to that sermon on the faith of Abraham, who "obeyed to go out unto a place which he was to receive for an inheritance, and he went out, not knowing whither he went."

III. The God of Isaac, an Average Man (Gen. 21-28)

A more logical division of the chapters in Genesis would omit Isaac, as our man-made books usually do. He was in no wise a hero or a giant; he was not great in ability, in reputation, in achievement, or in any other respect. He must have been an increasing disappointment to his father and mother, who had long awaited

his coming as the child of promise. Throughout his life he was continuously being overshadowed by stronger personalities; he was known as the son of his parents, as the husband of his wife, as the father of his children. He represented the phlegmatic temperament, and men of that sort never set the world on fire—as though the world needed to be set on fire!

Isaac was chosen of God, however, not in spite of his being a commonplace soul, but doubtless because of that fact. The record of the home in Genesis would not be complete without him, for he belonged to that mighty host of inconspicuous, unspectacular, “two-talent men,” whom the Lord must have loved, or He would not have made so many of them; persons whom we never appreciate until they are dead; gentle souls who are easy to get along with; men who are lovers of peace because they are lovers of God. Such folk are the salt of the earth, and they are much needed now, if only to put out certain of our fires!

This quiet man had two notable experiences: as a lad he seemed destined to become a living sacrifice on Mount Moriah; and later he won his bride in a most romantic way. (See the chart on the following page.) Like every other true marriage, this one was made in heaven; that is, the plans were made there. God intended Isaac and Rebekah for each other: they were alike in race, in station, in outlook upon life, and above all, in religion; but they were different in temperament. God brought them together in a beautiful way, through a sort of long-distance courtship. And He blessed them in their home, especially in their descendants, culminating in the coming of our Lord.

But every marriage made in heaven must be consum-

The Betrothal of Isaac and Rebekah

GENESIS 24	PLACE	CHARACTERS	TIME	ACTION	RESULT
<i>Scene One</i> (vv. 1-10)	Home in Canaan	Abraham Steward	Abraham's son needs a wife	Steward makes a solemn pledge	Steward makes a long journey
<i>Scene Two</i> (vv. 11-27)	Well at Nahor	Rebekah Steward Servants	Evening, a few weeks after Scene One	Steward's prayer is answered	Rebekah is deeply interested
<i>Scene Three</i> (vv. 28-53)	Home at Nahor	Bethuel and wife Laban Rebekah Steward	Same as above	A family conference	The family consents
<i>Scene Four</i> (vv. 54-61)	Same as above	Same as above	Morning after Scene Three	Steward pleads for immediate departure	Steward and Rebekah depart
<i>Scene Five</i> (vv. 62-67)	A field in Canaan	Isaac Rebekah Steward	A few weeks later	Meeting of Isaac and Rebekah	Isaac and Re- bekah found a new home

A DOMESTIC DRAMA: A LONG-DISTANCE COURTSHIP

mated on earth, by a man and a woman who are intensely human, and they must live in the midst of earthly limitations. In their lonely tent Isaac and Rebekah never dreamed of the romance which we read into their lives. They simply knew that they were building up the most important institution on earth. Like Millet's peasants in the *Angelus*, they were partners in work, in love and in worship.

This man was good rather than great. The Bible speaks of Jehovah as the God of Isaac, as well as of Abraham and of Jacob, because He is the God of all sorts of people. He is more pleased with a "two-talent man" such as Isaac, who was good, than with a "ten-talent man" like Napoleon, who was merely great. Thank God that He is never ashamed to be called the God of the average man!

IV. The God of Jacob, an Unscrupulous Man (*Gen. 25-49*)

Jacob resembled his mother rather than his father, belonging to the choleric (or arterial) temperament, known to us in Luther, Knox, and many others who have changed the course of history. Jacob was energetic, ambitious and aggressive; he was mastered by one single aim. His vices were equally characteristic: he was proud, impetuous, and at times revengeful. He was as full of human nature as David Harum was, and in his earlier years Jacob was as unscrupulous in bargaining. But with all of his failings he was ever a lover of home.

His name means "supplanter," and it was richly deserved. Early in life he practically stole his brother Esau's birthright, which carried with it the primacy

Jacob Deceives His Father

GENESIS 27	CHARACTERS	SITUATION	ACTION	RESULT
<i>Scene One</i> (vv. 1-4)	Father Elder son	Father loves elder son	Father asks for venison	Elder son goes hunting
<i>Scene Two</i> (vv. 5-17)	Mother Younger son	Mother loves younger son	Mother suggests a plot to deceive father	Younger son complies
<i>Scene Three</i> (vv. 18-29)	Father Younger son	Father awaiting elder son	Younger son deceives father	Younger son receives blessing
<i>Scene Four</i> (vv. 30-40)	Father Elder son	Elder son returns with venison	Elder son demands blessing	Elder son vows to kill brother
<i>Scene Five</i> (vv. 41-45)	Mother Younger son	Mother fears for younger son	Mother advises him to flee	Anxious suspense
<i>Scene Six</i> (27:46-28:5)	Father Mother Younger son	Mother asks father to send younger son away	Father assents	Younger son leaves home

A DOMESTIC DRAMA: THE SUPPLANTER IN THE HOME

over the patriarchal household; and later he stole the blessing which his father intended for Esau. In deceiving his aged, blind father, Jacob was the willing agent of his mother, and he deliberately acted out the sort of unspoken lies which are worst of all, because they are most likely to be believed. (See chart on the opposite page.) Such wiles would have failed with a shrewder man than Isaac, but Rebekah knew her husband's weakness. This entire incident illustrates the folly of parental favouritism, with its dire effects upon the children. Listen to Esau's heart-broken cry: "Hast thou but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father!" (27:38).

Consequently Esau hated Jacob, who had to flee for his life. One night, soon after he left his home in Canaan, he was sleeping out under the stars and he saw a heavenly vision (Gen. 28), by which he learned that he could not escape from God. In the morning he arose, set up a pillar to commemorate his vision, and called the place Bethel, "House of God." Then he vowed that if Jehovah would be his God, and would bless him, he would give to God the tithe of all that he earned. But he was to live for many a year before he gave his heart entirely to God.

Jacob went to his mother's people in Mesopotamia, and there he fell in love with Rachel, his cousin. He served seven years to win her hand, and those years "seemed to him but a few days, for the love which he had to her." He discovered too late that he had been tricked into wedding Rachel's elder sister, Leah, whom he did not love; so he served seven years more for Rachel. In time Jacob had four wives, but his heart went out only to Rachel. He became the father of

twelve sons, with one daughter, but he loved most of all Joseph and Benjamin, the sons of Rachel. From such humble sources flowed the jealousies and the intrigues which marked the entire course of Hebrew history.

Meanwhile Jacob had gone into partnership with his father-in-law, Laban, who had tricked him into wedding Leah. By shrewd practices Jacob was becoming wealthy in cattle and sheep, which constituted the riches of that time. His success caused so much resentment among his wives' people that he was forced to leave Mesopotamia. But ere he finally parted from Laban the two of them set up a pillar, as a silent witness that neither would encroach on the domain of the other, and Laban uttered those beautiful words known to us as the Mizpah Benediction (31:49).

The turning-point in Jacob's life came at Peniel, "Face of God." For years he had been forging ahead by trampling upon the rights of others, but at last he was to learn a better way of living. After becoming reconciled with Laban, he brought about a reconciliation with Esau, partly by munificent gifts, and then he became reconciled to God (32:22-32). That night, alone with the angel, he wrestled till the breaking of the day, and he would not let the angel go without leaving his blessing. This experience does not mean that God is reluctant to grant His blessing, but that such a man as Jacob needs to persevere in prayer until his heart and life are completely dedicated to God.

Jacob emerged from Peniel with a new heart, and likewise with a new name, Israel, which was to become the name of the Hebrew people. Ever afterwards, so far as we know, he lived in a way that was worthy of

a child of God; and yet, strange as it seems to us, from that time on he suffered afflictions greater than he had known before his change of heart. His sons became as disloyal to him as he had been to Isaac, and as disloyal to each other as he had been to Esau. Such are the after effects of sins although forgiven.

The most important fact about Jacob, however, is that he was chosen to become one of the founders of the Hebrew nation, and so the record often speaks of "the God of Jacob." What a phrase! If it read, "the God of Israel," that would seem proper, for Israel was a prince among men, but Jacob was a supplanter! The God of Jacob is notable, then, for His courage in choosing such a representative; for His perseverance in never letting Jacob go; and for His grace in bestowing divine favour upon such a sinner. The God who chose such a supplanter, and forgave him, and blessed him, is waiting to save and to use the weakest and the worst of us. That is why we sing, "Ye chosen seed of Israel's race, ye ransomed from the fall."

V. The God of Joseph, a Practical Idealist
(Gen. 37-50)

Joseph is one of the most pleasing characters in the Bible, and the record of his life makes a fitting close to this book, for he shows the new family at its best. In temperament he was a blending of the various types, with a tendency towards the sanguine. He was a practical idealist; that is, he lived and worked, day by day and year after year, in the light of the early dreams which had come to him from God.

As a lad on the farm, Joseph was the favourite son of his father; hence he gained the ill will of his elder

brothers. Foolishly he told them his dreams, and he told his father their faults; so he was seized by them and thrown into a pit; and he would have been slain if Reuben had not intervened. A little later, following the suggestion of Judah, the lad was sold to a passing caravan and was borne off to Egypt. There the visionary youth of seventeen toiled until he was thirty, cultivating habits of industry and friendliness, but apparently making no progress towards freedom from slavery.

After a time this young slave was appointed overseer of his master Potiphar's house, and there he met his most insidious temptation, in the person of his master's wife, who strove in vain to make him sin (Gen. 39). Courteously but emphatically he refused to yield to her entreaties, and thus he showed us how to meet temptation. First of all is the divine element: "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" Then there is the human element: Joseph would not hearken to the temptress, and he would not be with her. Trust God, and keep away from the one with whom it is easy to sin!

Because of this refusal Joseph was thrown into prison, where his experiences contributed to his practical education, just as the imprisonment of O. Henry in the Ohio State Penitentiary enabled him to become a master of the short story. In prison Joseph won the friendship of Pharaoh's chief butler, who was later to be God's agent in extricating Joseph from prison. But for two years after that butler had been set free, he forgot his friend—an illustration of "man's ingratitude to man." Such ingratitude has been styled America's favourite sin.

Joseph's opportunity came when Pharaoh dreamed two dreams which none of his wise men could interpret; then the butler remembered his young friend in prison. Joseph was summoned, and he told the king that his two dreams portended seven years of plenty in Egypt, to be followed by seven years of famine (a fact which suggested to Mr. R. W. Babson his idea of the cycles of prosperity and adversity). Then Joseph advised Pharaoh to "look out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt," so as to husband the surplus in the years of plenty, that there might be food for all in the years of famine. Such a program of conservation makes us think of Mr. Herbert Hoover during the World War.

The only man wise enough to organize and administer such an enterprise was Joseph himself, and he was transferred from the prison house to the office of Secretary of Agriculture, with powers second only to those of the king. He proved to be a model business man, because he had the sort of character which is the foundation of success in business—according to the late J. P. Morgan in his testimony before a committee of Congress. Joseph was able to plan vast enterprises and to watch over multitudinous details. Better still, he knew how to get along with all sorts of people, and to lead them in doing their work.

While Joseph was serving his adopted land, he was God's agent in preserving his father's household. When Joseph's brothers came down to Egypt to buy grain, he recognized them, although they did not recognize him. Instead of revealing himself to them at once, he forced himself to wait until he was certain that they loved their aged father and their youngest brother, Jacob and

Joseph, the Benefactor of His Family

GENESIS 42	PLACE	CHARACTERS	SITUATION	ACTION	RESULT
<i>Scene One</i> (vv. 1-5)	The farm home in Canaan	Jacob; eleven sons (all shepherds)	A famine in Canaan	Jacob sends ten sons to Egypt for food	Jacob and Benjamin tarry at home
<i>Scene Two</i> (vv. 6-17)	Joseph's office in Egypt	Joseph Ten shepherds	Joseph recognizes them; they do not recognize him	Joseph treats them as foreign spies	Joseph puts them in prison
<i>Scene Three</i> (vv. 18-25)	"	"	Joseph tests their love for their father and Benjamin	Joseph demands one of them as a hostage	Joseph keeps Reuben as a hostage
<i>Scene Four</i> (vv. 26-34)	Highway tavern on route to Canaan	Nine shepherds	Find their money in their sacks	Continue their journey homeward	Fear and gloom
<i>Scene Five</i> (vv. 35-38)	Farm home in Canaan	Jacob Ten sons	Sons recount experiences in Egypt	Jacob reproaches his sons	Anxiety and suspense

A DOMESTIC DRAMA: A FAMILY REUNITED (Act One)
(Make a similar chart from Gen. 43-45, outlining Act Two)

Benjamin. In typical Oriental fashion, which seems to us indirect, he set himself to discover their real feelings towards these two, and so he made possible one of the most touching domestic dramas in literature. (See the chart on the opposite page.)

The denouement came immediately after Judah's plea for the life of Benjamin (Gen. 44:18-34). The key-note here is *father*, which keeps ringing out as in the Master's parable of the loving father (Luke 15). The secondary note is *brother*. This plea is notable for its pathos, and it was all the more effective with Joseph because it came from Judah, who had first suggested the selling of his brother into slavery. Thus at last Joseph was assured that his brethren loved their father and Benjamin almost as dearly as he loved them himself.

When Joseph made himself known, his brethren feared that he would slay them, for in ancient lands rulers were prodigal of life. But Joseph forgave them, partly for their father's sake; and years afterward, when their father had died, Joseph assured them again that he had forgiven them, and that his prime reason was his faith in God (50:15-21). "It was not you that sent me hither, but God." "Ye meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." What a philosophy of life! How it harmonizes our difficulties about foreordination and free will! And how it encourages us to forgive, as we hope to be forgiven!

Such forgiveness of wrongs is like God's forgiveness of sins. Joseph forgave, not petty pin-pricks, which he would never have noticed, but deadly wrongs—envy, greed, lying, attempted murder—like the sins which crucified Jesus. Joseph forgave those whom it is hard-

est to forgive, his elder brothers, who should have been his protectors. And he forgave them in the hardest way: he initiated and completed that long course of events which resulted in reconciliation. If he had waited until the guilty parties took the first step, he might have waited forever, because they did not know that he was alive. Joseph forgave, therefore, somewhat as Almighty God forgives.

Meanwhile the aged father was waiting out on his distant farm, wondering what had befallen his sons. When at last they returned to tell him that Joseph was alive, and that he was the Prime Minister of Egypt, Jacob was afraid to believe them. But when they pointed to the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry Jacob and his household to Egypt, that venerable patriarch looked upon those "sacramental wagons" as visible tokens of the son whom he could not see. Jacob's joy was like that of the father in the parable: "This my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!"

The arrival of Jacob and his household in Egypt created a delicate situation, for they were shepherds, and shepherds were an abomination to the Egyptians. But Joseph was not ashamed of the shepherds from the hills of Canaan; he introduced his father and five of his brothers to Pharaoh, and the aged shepherd actually blessed the king! Why not? "The less is blessed of the better." Joseph's loyalty to his kindred, including the brethren who had done him deadly wrong, is like that of the Son of God, Who is never ashamed to call us brethren.

The keynote of this man's life and work was loyalty, which is "the willing, practical, thorough-going devo-

tion of a person to a cause, as that cause is embodied in a person" (Royce). In youth and in mature years, in adversity and in prosperity, Joseph was ever loyal. He was a loyal slave and a loyal master, a loyal son and a loyal brother. He was loyal to himself and to his early dreams. The secret of his loyalty lay in his religion; he was loyal to God because God was loyal to him, under the promises of the Covenant.

Practical Lessons from Genesis

This book reveals Jehovah as the Covenant God of the chosen family, which includes all sorts of people. He deals with each of His children in a different way, and He watches tenderly over the rise and progress of the home, with its recurring problems of adjustment between husband and wife, between parent and child, between brother and brother, between uncle and nephew, between master and servant, between neighbour and neighbour. Here is human history in miniature: in God's plan for the world He made the home as the first and greatest of human institutions, and through the home He gradually prepared for the coming of the Redeemer. Such is the abiding message of Genesis.

The most important place on earth for any one of us, therefore, is home. Nothing else should concern us so deeply as the founding of the Christian home and the rearing of little children. The most important fact about any home is its religion, bringing the members of the family into right relations with God and with everyone else, and enabling them to make the most of themselves as children of God and servants of men.

Are not these the things which matter most, now as when the world was young?

The worst enemy of the home, therefore, is sin—not poverty or disease, or even death, but sin! If the members of the household are not right with God and with each other, nothing can atone for such irreligion. The blackest fact on earth is sin, and it still centres in the family. Hence the greatest need of every household is the Saviour, Who was promised under the Covenant yonder in Genesis, and Who was born in the heart of a humble home. Would that our world might turn back to those grand old simplicities of Genesis, when life and religion centred in the home!

Suggestions for Review and for Discussion

1. What does Genesis teach about God? The Creation?
2. What is religion? Sin? The Covenant?
3. Is *Paradise Lost* true to the facts in Genesis?
4. Write briefly on the importance of the home.
5. Explain "The God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob."
6. Point out the dramatic elements in chapter twenty-two.
7. Name the vices and virtues of ancient Hebrews and modern Jews.
8. Comment on Joseph as a business man.
9. Can you justify his land policy?
10. State the most impressive fact in Genesis; the most interesting; the most helpful.

Topics for Further Study

1. State the traditional opinion about authorship and date; the "liberal" opinion.
2. Suggest an original name for the book.

3. Indicate the key sentence; the most vital chapter.
4. Prepare a brief working outline.
5. Discuss the literary style.
6. What contribution does it make to Theology?
7. What contribution to Ethics?
8. What use is made of it in the New Testament?
In hymns?
9. Of what practical value is it today?
10. How should it be taught to children? To adults?

Memorable Chapters: Genesis 1, 3, 12, 18, 22, 24, 28,
32, 44, 50.

II

EXODUS: THE BIRTH OF THE NATION

THIS book differs from Genesis, both in purpose and in contents. Genesis was written to reveal Jehovah as the Covenant God of the Hebrew home; Exodus, to reveal Him as the Covenant God of the Hebrew nation. Between the events narrated in Genesis and those in Exodus several hundred years have elapsed (Ex. 12:40, 41), and the Hebrews have greatly increased in numbers; so that the record now deals, not with the simple joys and sorrows of a patriarchal household, but with the more complicated experiences of their descendants in laying the foundations of the Hebrew state. The difference between the two books is somewhat like that between the chronicles of an English family which came over to Virginia in 1607, and Professor A. B. Hart's book, *The Formation of the American Union*.

There is a striking parallel between the experiences of the Hebrews in extricating themselves from bondage in Egypt, and of our own forefathers in setting themselves free from what they styled the "yoke of Britain." Just as in 1776 there seemed scarcely a chance in a thousand for those thirteen feeble colonies to achieve their independence, so in the fourteenth century before Christ there seemed scarcely a chance in a million for those thirteen Hebrew tribes to gain their freedom.

They were outnumbered; they were practically unarmed; and they were wholly inexperienced in warfare. Worse still, they were without leaders, and their labour was profitable to their overlords. Apart from faith in God, therefore, they had no reason to hope for escape.

From this point of view the Book of Exodus shows that in the birth of the Hebrew nation there were five different stages, each of which finds illustration in the early history of our own people. These five stages suggest a working outline of the book.

I. The Raising Up of the Leader (Ex. 1-4)

If subject people are to become free, they must have a leader. With the Hebrews it was Moses; with our forefathers it was Washington. These two men differed much, but in three respects they were alike: each of them had sympathy for his people, an understanding of the foe, and, best of all, faith in God. This third characteristic was the secret of the success of Moses.

The first few chapters in Exodus show the beauty of home life among the best of the Hebrews, despite the rigours of bondage. The King of Egypt commanded that all of the Hebrew boy babies should be slain at birth, but by the blessing of God, baby Moses was spared, because of the courage of the midwives and the tactfulness of his mother. The story of his being hidden in the ark of bulrushes, so that the princess would discover him when she came down to the river to bathe, reaches its climax when she adopts the suggestion of the baby's older sister, Miriam, and offers the mother of Moses wages for taking care of her own child. Think

of the wages of a godly mother! Thus God employed four different sorts of women to safeguard that one little baby!

In the providence of God the growing lad seems later to have been transferred to the king's palace, and to have become learned in the wisdom of the Egyptians, who were the most cultured people of that age (cf. Acts 7:22). Perhaps Moses attended the University of Heliopolis, "The Oxford of Ancient Egypt." Throughout his entire career he illustrated the practical value of education. But all the while he was at heart a Hebrew. Doubtless he did wrong in slaying the Egyptian (2:11-15), but by that rash deed he showed that his sympathies were with his own people, who were being oppressed. For them he gave up the privileges of the palace, and accepted exile from Egypt. Such a sacrifice is made by the Hindu convert to Christianity, who relinquishes wealth, ease and power, gladly choosing poverty, hardship and persecution. Such is the "reproach of Christ" (Heb. 11:25, 26).

During this first period Moses gained a sympathetic understanding of his people's wrongs, and a thorough understanding of the Egyptian rulers. But still, at the age of forty, he needed to know the God of the Hebrews as his own personal God; and in mastering this most important lesson he spent another forty years. The ideal place for him to become acquainted with God was out in the wilderness, where he established his home. That sort of monotonous existence either makes a man narrow and commonplace, or else it enables him to find himself and to grow strong. The difference lies largely in the field of religion.

Towards the end of this period Moses had the most significant experience of his life. While he was in the midst of his daily tasks he saw a bush that was burning, but was not consumed. In that burning bush he saw the glory of God, and then he heard the call to service. In that hour Moses began to be a more reverent and a more humble servant of God, and he began to devote his God-given powers to the service of his people. First the vision, and then the task. The vision came only once, but it lived on in his heart and made him a power in the kingdom of God. This passage (Ex. 3, 4) is one of the most important in the Pentateuch.

Moses was intensely human, and he hesitated before he accepted the call of God. When he was told to return to Egypt and deliver his people from bondage, he held back. Perhaps he was afraid to return to Egypt, but more likely he was conscious of his own inability to accomplish the impossible. Hence he offered five excuses, which sound familiar to all who have striven to escape from unwelcome tasks. His five excuses show that the service of God is largely a matter of will, and the replies of God show that divine grace is sufficient for all human needs (3:11-4:17).

The most vital fact here is God's grace, or rather, His perseverance. Throughout long years He had been preparing Moses for service, and at last Moses was ready in all save in will. God answered the objections of His timid servant, bringing him little by little to the glad acceptance of his hazardous mission. At last Moses became obedient to his heavenly vision, and throughout the last forty years of his life he must have

EXODUS 7-12	SEVERITY	DEITY AFFECTED	MAGICIANS	HEBREWS	PHARAOH
1. <i>Blood</i>	Inconvenience	Nile and fish	Imitate	Share ?	Ignores
2. <i>Frogs</i>	"	Frog	"	" ?	Yields
3. <i>Lice</i>	"	Sacred beasts	"Finger of God"	" ?	Refuses
4. <i>Beetles</i>	Injury and loss	"	Silent	Exempt	Compromise I and II
5. <i>Murrain</i>	"	"	"	"	Hardens heart
6. <i>Boils</i>	"	"	Afflicted	"	Refuses
7. <i>Hail</i>	Universal among Egyptians	"	—	"	Softens
8. <i>Locusts</i>	"	"	—	"	Compromise III
9. <i>Darkness</i>	"	Sun	—	"	Compromise IV
10. <i>First-born</i>	"	Pharaoh	—	"	Surrenders

THE EFFECTS OF THE TEN PLAGUES

rejoiced daily in the promise, "Certainly I will be with thee."

II. The Preparation of the People (Ex. 5-13)

Meanwhile God had been creating in the hearts of His people a desire for freedom, and a determination to achieve it at any cost. He employed two different methods: the oppression and the plagues. During the oppression He created the desire for freedom, and by means of the plagues He fostered their determination to achieve that freedom. Here are God's works of providence, both negative and positive: during the oppression He indirectly caused the wrath of man to praise Him; and in the plagues He directly employed His almighty power. Never in history have a few years witnessed such a transformation in the spirit of a people, and the only explanation of such a change is the power of God.

The effect of the plagues was three-fold. First of all, they confirmed Moses in his assurance that he was called of God to set His people free. Secondly, the plagues convinced the Hebrews that their God was mightier than all of the deities of Egypt. (See the chart on the opposite page.) Thirdly, the plagues revealed to Pharaoh and his people the futility of fighting against Jehovah God. For example, contrast the king's first insolent refusal to let the Hebrews go (5:2) with his later abject pleadings for mercy from the God of the Hebrews (10:16, 17). To the Egyptians the tenth and last plague was the worst of all; it was the sign of the judgment of Jehovah upon them for oppressing His people. But to Moses and the Hebrews that same plague

was the visible fulfilment of His promises under the Covenant.

III. The Departure from Egypt (Ex. 14-18)

At last the hour had come for the Hebrews to go out. If they had attempted to do so before, or if they had delayed a little while, they would have failed. But they went out at exactly the right hour, because they went out at the call of God, and He makes no mistakes. There is an element of time in all things human. For instance, at every blast furnace near Pittsburgh there is a man who determines when to have the plug of clay removed from the base of the furnace, so that the fiery metal may flow out into the waiting moulds of sand. If that man acts too soon, or if he waits too long, the entire firing will be ruined; but if he is master of his art he knows almost to the minute when the impurities have been burned out of the iron ore. What a picture of God as He watches over His children in the midst of the burning fiery furnace!

The actual departure from Egypt came suddenly. After long months of preparation, all at once the Hebrews found themselves standing on the banks of one of the arms of the Red Sea, with impassable barriers on either hand, and with the hosts of Pharaoh sweeping upon them from the rear. Hence those childlike Hebrews, unaccustomed to war's alarms, became panic-stricken, and cried out against Moses for leading them on to destruction. But Moses was not afraid; like Gustavus Adolphus, or William of Orange, he had made an alliance with God, the Invisible King. In confirmation of the faith of His servant, God said to Moses, "Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak unto the

Children of Israel that they go forward! ” (14:15). Here is the inspired original of our modern hymn, “Lead on, O King Eternal, the day of march has come.”

The crossing of the Red Sea marked the birthday of the Hebrew nation. “It created the people of Israel; they never forgot it ” (Cornill). No other event in Hebrew history was so important, except perhaps the giving of the Law at Sinai. Was that crossing due to a miracle? Historians tell us that in 1738, at the Isthmus of Perekop, the wind opened up a passage through the waters; and again, that Major General Tulloch once saw the wind drive back, for seven miles, the waters of Lake Menzaleh at the entrance to the Suez Canal, so that an army could have crossed over practically dry shod. As a matter of fact, no army did cross over at either of those times, for a wind mighty enough to hold back such a body of water would impede the progress of marching men, not to speak of women and children. However others may interpret these more recent events, conservative students continue to look upon the Exodus as a miracle.

When the Hebrews were safely across the Red Sea their troubles had only begun. In the wilderness they were in danger of death from starvation and from thirst. Those who wandered from camp were in danger from wild beasts and from the people who dwelt in the desert. Worst of all, those childlike people were in danger from internal dissensions; they were as yet a flabby folk, strongly individualistic, and they were torn asunder by jealousies. In Egypt their hearts had begun to burn with desires for freedom, but in the wilderness those fires quickly became cold. They began to fear

that within a few months they would be scattered out over the wilderness as shepherdless sheep, and so they wished that they were back in Egypt.

God held those discontented people together, nevertheless, throughout forty years in that wilderness. He provided them with food and water (Ex. 15, 16). In that same country during the World War the Allies experienced great difficulty in supplying their troops with food and drink; but what could they have done if they had lacked modern facilities for transportation, and likewise a home base of supplies? The preservation of that multitude in the wilderness for a generation was almost as marvellous as their safe passage through the Red Sea. Thank God for such works of Providence!

The task of organizing such a multitude fell largely to Moses, and like many a new executive, he attempted to do almost everything himself, instead of delegating as much as possible to others. But he showed his practical wisdom and his humility by accepting the suggestion of Jethro (Ex. 18), who explained the principle known to us as "division of labour." Moses soon developed into one of the greatest organizers and leaders in all history.

IV. The New Constitution (Ex. 19-24)

When subject people become free, they must learn to submit to new laws. Shortly after the crossing of the Red Sea, the Israelites received the Law at Mount Sinai. That Law consisted of two parts: the Ten Commandments, which we may term the Constitution of the Nation; and the Book of the Covenant (20:22-23:33), or the By-laws. The Constitution proper was intended to be permanent, and it was brief, simple,

and remarkably comprehensive; whereas the By-laws were more or less temporary and local, and many of them are of little interest to us. Without some such body of laws, however, the Hebrews could scarcely have survived, just as our own nation could not long have endured without laws other than the Constitution.

The Preface to the Ten Commandments shows that the Constitution of the Hebrews, unlike our own, was fundamentally religious. "I am Jehovah, thy God, Who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." These words introduce the greatest chapter in Exodus, and sound the keynote of the book: loyalty to God! The Ten Commandments contain the fundamental laws of the Hebrews, phrased in such a form that they could be handed down from generation to generation, and incorporated in the Christian religion, without a change. This Hebrew Constitution is superior to our own, and to every other, because the Ten Commandments were given by immediate revelation from God.

The Ten Commandments are divided into two tables. There is much difference of opinion about where to draw the line between the two: does the fourth commandment, for instance, belong to the first table or to the second? The alignment suggested below is the most common among Protestants today, as it seems to have been among the Hebrews of old.

The first table, consisting of four commandments, deals with fundamental religion, or man's duty to God. The first commandment enjoins ethical monotheism; it requires the whole earth to worship and serve only the one true God. The second enjoins spiritual worship; it forbids the use of idols or images. These two are

great missionary commandments. The third enjoins reverence in speech; and the fourth, the observance of the Sabbath Day. This fourth commandment is transitional, for it governs our relations both to God and to our fellow-men, as we learned anew in 1912, when our Government set the vast majority of her postal employees free from labour on the Lord's Day.

The second table deals with fundamental morality, or man's duty to man. The fifth commandment teaches reverence for parents; the sixth, the sanctity of human life; the seventh, reverence for personality; the eighth, respect for property; the ninth, regard for the truth; and the last, contentment. When people wish to play ten-pins with God's holy law, they need but strike this last commandment and all of the other nine go toppling down.

These Ten Words are still binding upon Christians. The Lord Jesus accepted them at their face value (*i. e.*, without reservations), and He interpreted them in the spirit of love (Matt. 22:37-40; Luke 10:25-37). "Love is the fulfilling of the law." A man who loves God supremely will keep the first four commandments; a man who loves his neighbour as himself will keep the other six. As one of our public men said recently, "America needs to get back to Jesus and the Ten Commandments."

Turning again to Exodus—these holy laws were broken almost as soon as they were given (Ex. 32). While Moses was in the mount the second time, communing with God, the people prevailed upon Aaron, the brother of Moses, to make them a golden calf, somewhat like their Egyptian masters had employed in worship. The Hebrews, however, intended to use

their image in the worship of Jehovah, thus breaking the second commandment rather than the first. All of this was portrayed in lurid, spectacular fashion in the motion picture drama, "The Ten Commandments."

V. The New Capital (Ex. 25-40)

In speaking of the Tabernacle as the capital of the Israelites, we are using words loosely, for the Tabernacle, like the Law of Moses, was primarily a religious institution. And yet both the Tabernacle and the Law served lofty social and political ends. The Hebrew nation, ideally at least, was the visible kingdom of Jehovah, the Invisible King, and so the place where He met with the chosen representatives of His people formed the centre round which the life and work of that people revolved. Without the unifying influence of the Tabernacle, that people would scarcely have held together for forty years in the wilderness, just as our own nation would scarcely have survived without some central capital. So it is in Poland today, and in many another struggling nation in Europe.

Those ancient Hebrews were a homeless people, sojourning in the wilderness, without a "local habitation and a name." As they followed the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, they never knew whether they were to encamp in a given spot for a few months, or only for a day. How, then, could they fix upon one central capital? In the providence of God they were led to erect the portable Tabernacle, which was about as large as an old-fashioned country schoolhouse, but different in shape. (See the diagram opposite p. 48.) Wherever they pitched their tents, first of all they set up the Tabernacle, and then they grouped themselves about

it, somewhat as they were afterwards to settle round about Jerusalem.

The best way, after all, to bring people into right relations with each other is to bring them into right relations with God. The spectacle of that Tabernacle in the midst of the Hebrew people reminds us that in our own country, and in every other, the central place in each community should be set apart for the House of God; and that the welfare of a nation depends chiefly upon its religion. "Blessed is the nation whose God is Jehovah."

The Book of Exodus has no formal conclusion, for it leads up naturally to the Book of Leviticus, under which we shall consider the religious uses of the Tabernacle. At the beginning of Exodus we saw thirteen tribes in bondage; at the end we see a nation ready to start out upon its career as the most important people in the ancient world. The leader of that people, Moses, was the most important person in ancient history. The principal character in the Book of Exodus, however, is Jehovah, the Covenant God of the Hebrew nation. Out from that nation in the fulness of time He brought forth the promised Messiah. Such is the heart of Exodus, and of the Bible. "The message of the Old Testament might be summed up in one word—God!" (A. B. Davidson).

Suggestions for Review and for Discussion

1. Write briefly on the blessings of the bondage.
2. Why is the Burning Bush the emblem of Scottish Churches?
3. Illustrate from Exodus—"God's works of Providence."

4. Show the importance of the plagues.
5. Describe the Jewish Passover, as celebrated today.
6. Prepare a biographical sketch of Moses, in three periods.
7. What is the missionary application of the first commandment? The second?
8. How does the Lord Jesus interpret the Ten Commandments?
9. Discuss the miraculous element in Exodus.
10. How did the Hebrews support their religious institutions?

Note.—See the questions under Genesis (p. 32).

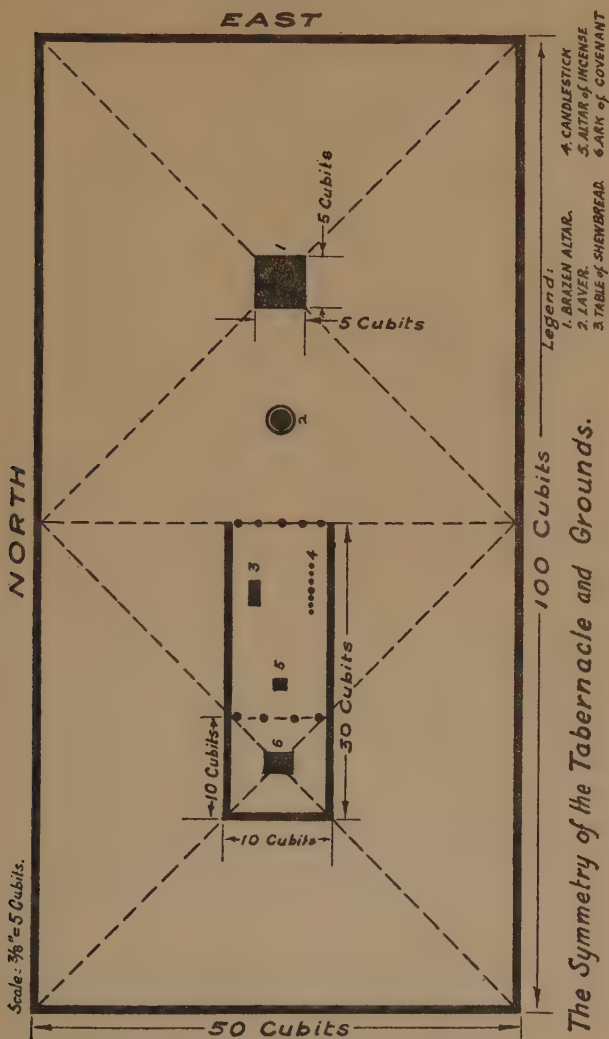
Memorable Chapters: Exodus 1, 3, 12, 14, 20, 32, 36.

III

LEVITICUS: THE BEGINNINGS OF THE CHURCH

THIS book deals with organized religion. Religion began in the home, but when God's people increased in numbers they needed stated forms of public worship. Their rites and ceremonies were so different from our own that we must reverently employ the historical imagination, looking at their customs as the best of the Hebrews must have looked at them, and feeling as they must have felt. From their point of view the external requirements of religion were four: a place where God made Himself known; a people whom He claimed as His own; a priesthood through whom He received the offerings of His people; and a carefully regulated system of worship. Underlying these four requirements, as the bed-rock of the Book of Leviticus, was the holiness of God.

The word holiness means "separation," or spiritual superiority. When it refers to God it means that He is high above all other beings. When it refers to men and women, it means that within their human limitations they resemble God. And when it refers to things, it means that they are set apart for the service of God, somewhat as the bread and the wine are now set apart in the sacrament. All holiness on earth, therefore, is



derived from the holiness of God. "Ye shall be holy; for I, Jehovah your God, am holy" (19:2). This is the key verse of the book.

1. The Tabernacle: A Holy Place (Cf. Ex. 25-40)

This book takes for granted a knowledge of the latter portion of Exodus, showing that the Tabernacle occupied the centre of the camp, the place of utmost prominence, because it was the centre of the Hebrew life and religion. According to the pattern given to Moses in the mount, the Tabernacle was so constructed that it could easily be set up and taken down, as the various encampments required. The Tabernacle grounds were laid out with careful heed to symmetry (see the chart on the preceding page) and to sanitation. The Tabernacle proper was oblong in shape, and was constructed out of the finest materials available, on the principle that only the best is good enough for the worship of God.

The Tabernacle proper was not a meeting place for God's people, but a place where God met with their representatives. Instead of the sort of equipment which we install in our churches, the furnishings of the Tabernacle and its grounds included only six prominent articles, each of which bore a symbolic meaning. Towards the eastern end of the Tabernacle grounds stood the Altar of Burnt Offering, to symbolize atonement for sin. Between the Altar of Burnt Offering and the Tabernacle proper stood the Laver, to symbolize cleansing from guilty stains. Into this Outer Court all Hebrew men were to bring their sacrifices, thus receiving assurance of divine pardon and cleansing, both for themselves and for their households, somewhat as

members of the Church now receive baptism and the Lord's Supper.

In the Tabernacle proper, the larger of the two divisions was an oblong room known as the Holy Place, into which only the priests might come. Here were the Golden Candlestick, with its seven branches, the Table of Showbread, and the Golden Altar of Incense, symbolizing, respectively, the sort of mercies which we now receive in the Christian Church: spiritual light, spiritual food and spiritual aspiration. To the Hebrews the gold in the candlestick was an emblem of the perfection of God, and so was the number seven. The light was kept ever burning, as a token that the presence of God dispels the darkness of ignorance and sin. The Table of Showbread, about which the Master spoke (Mark 2:26), was replenished every week, as a token of God's unfailing grace in satisfying the heart-hunger of His children. The Golden Altar of Incense, from which sweet odours kept rising every morn and eve, was symbolical of the prayers and the praises of God's people, ascending up to the throne of heaven.

The most important part of the Tabernacle was the Holy of Holies, which was in shape a perfect cube. In the centre of this Most Holy Place stood the Ark of the Covenant, which enshrined the Ten Commandments and other sacred mementoes of the Exodus. This Ark was the most important feature of the entire Tabernacle. Covering the Ark was the Mercy Seat, on which the High Priest once a year sprinkled the blood of the sacrificial lamb, thus showing that the requirements of the Law had been fulfilled. Above the Mercy Seat were the two Cherubim, silent symbols of

God's watchful care, and shining out from between the Cherubim was the Shekinah glory, a symbol of the presence of God.

The Holy of Holies, as we learn from the Epistle to the Hebrews, was typical of heaven, into which the Lord Jesus, our High Priest, has gone to make intercession for the children of God. After a while we too shall pass within the veil which separates this world from that, and then we shall be forever with the Lord. Meanwhile we have a right to all of the privileges of the Christian Church. Hence we sing that old-fashioned hymn, suggested by the Hebrew Mercy Seat, "From Every Stormy Wind that Blows."

To certain sophisticated minds all of this Hebrew symbolism seems childish. But still it is in keeping with the modern principle of using object lessons in teaching childlike people. Surely we should thank God that we live on this side of the Cross, and that we no longer need those Hebrew symbols which pointed to His coming and to His death. But we should recognize that the Covenant God used those visible symbols in training the people who were at last to give to the world the Messiah, as the fulfilment of their inspired hopes.

II. The Sacrifices: Means to Holiness (Lev. 1-7)

This portion of the book describes the offerings which the Hebrews were to present regularly. (See the chart on the opposite page.) These sacrifices were of two sorts: those with blood, and those without; but those without blood were probably never offered alone. The chief purpose of these sacrifices was to show God's forgiveness of sins, and so the animals offered in sacrifice

LEVITICUS 1-7	SACRIFICE	OFFERER	PRIEST	CHARACTERISTIC	MEANING
<i>Burnt</i> (Chap. 1)	Bullock; ram; he-goat; doves (pigeons)	Presents; lays on hands; kills	Sprinkles blood; burns fat and flesh	Consumed on altar	Contrition; dedication of self (Ro. 12:1)
<i>Meal</i> (Chap. 2)	Fine flour; oil; frankincense; salt; no leaven	Takes out handful	Burns hand- ful; owns remainder	No blood; no leaven; no nothing given to offerer	Dedication of substance
<i>Peace</i> (Chap. 3)	Male or fe- male of flock or herd (with- out blemish)	Presents; lays on hands; kills; eats portion	Sprinkles blood; burns fat; receives breast	Sacrificial meal	Gratitude; thank-offering; vows
<i>Sin</i> (Chap. 4)	Bullock (for priest or con- gregation); he-goat or ram; kid; etc.	Presents; lays on hands; kills	Sprinkles blood; burns fat; receives flesh	Blood on Altar of Incense	Contrition; expiation
<i>Trespass</i> (Ch. 5:14-6:7)	Ram of a certain value	Presents; lays on hands; kills; makes restitution of one-fifth extra	Sprinkles blood; burns fat; receives flesh; receives restitution	Restitution; release from debt; freedom of slaves	Contrition; satisfaction

THE REGULAR OFFERINGS PRESCRIBED IN LEVITICUS

were to be "clean," a word which indicates physical fitness to appear before God. They were to be without blemish, and in every other respect they were to be of the very best. Otherwise they could not have typified the Perfect Sacrifice.

The method of offering these sacrifices was prescribed with minute detail. In the animal offerings the customary sacrificial acts were five: first, the presentation of the animal by the offerer at the door of the Tent of Meeting, as a token that the offerer wished to come into right relations with God; second, the laying of the offerer's hands on the victim's head, as a token that the offerer dedicated himself to God; third, the slaying of the animal by the offerer, as a token that he wished God's forgiveness; fourth, the application of the blood to the altar by the priest, as a token that the sacrifice had been made, because the life had been poured out; and fifth, the burning of the sacrifice, as a whole or in part, as a token that the sin had been taken away. In pursuance of this general plan, however, each of the five great sacrifices had its own characteristic features.

The burnt offering (Lev. 1), or whole burnt offering, was entirely consumed upon the altar, because it symbolized the sorrow of the offerer for his sins, and the complete dedication of himself to God, after his sins had been forgiven. The meal offering (Lev. 2), incorrectly called the meat offering, consisted of the fruit of the farmer's toil, apart from his flocks and herds, and it symbolized the dedication of his substance to God. The peace offerings (Lev. 3), or thank offerings, served three ends: sometimes they

were given because of the goodness of God in the past; again, as tokens of desire for His blessing; and at other times, as general expressions of gratitude to God for His mercies. Such thank offerings assumed the form of eucharistic feasts, at which both people and priests ate together before God. The Hebrew religion was primarily one of joy, made possible through the forgiveness of sins.

The sin offering and the trespass offering (Lev. 4, 5) are difficult to differentiate. The sin offering seems to have related primarily to sins which concerned the offerer and God; whereas the trespass offering, which is sometimes called the guilt offering, seems to have related to wrongs committed against other persons, especially in their property, as in the stealing of cattle or sheep. The characteristic feature of the trespass offering was the restitution of the amount of the loss inflicted, plus an additional penalty of one-fifth. The restitution was made by the wrong-doer to the person whom he had wronged, and the additional amount was given to the priest. The sin offering, however, was the more important of the two, for it was prescribed for the annual Day of Atonement.

What was the purpose of these costly sacrifices? They were the visible symbols of the ways in which the Covenant God wished to bring His unholy children into right relations with Himself, and with one another. With the exception of the meal offering and the peace offering, those sacrifices encouraged the people frankly to face the blackest facts of sin and shame, and to seek divine pardon and cleansing. In the midst of the camp, so that all could see, the smoke kept ever ascending from the

Altar of Burnt Offering, as a constant reminder of the presence of the Holy God, tender to sympathize with His children's sufferings, and mighty to save them from their sins. So that this entire sacrificial system helped to prepare men's hearts for the coming of the Christ of the Cross.

III. The Priests: Holy Men of God (Lev. 8-10)

The priests were much more influential in Old Testament days than we usually suppose. They were the descendants of Aaron, and one of them was the high priest; the other male members of the tribe of Levi were known as Levites. The office of the priests differed from that of the prophets, for whereas the prophets represented God before the people, as His ambassadors, the priests represented the people before God. The priests, therefore, needed human sympathies, but they needed much more the blessing of God.

The ceremonies in consecrating Aaron and his sons, the original priests, were held in the presence of the entire congregation, so as to impress upon their hearts the dignity of the priestly office. These ceremonies consisted of washing with water, as a symbol of the priest's need of cleaning from sin; investment with holy garments to symbolize his high calling; and anointing with oil as a token that the grace of God rested upon him.

The sacrifices at the consecration of the priests included the sin offering, the burnt offering and a special offering, the blood of which was applied to Aaron's right ear, to the thumb of his right hand, and to the toe of his right foot, thus symbolizing the dedication

of his entire being to the service of God. In like manner, the oil and the blood which were applied to the altar, as well as to Aaron and his sons, and to their garments, symbolized the complete consecration of these sinful beings to the service of God.

After these priests had been inducted into office by Moses, they alone were to offer sacrifices, and likewise to bless the people in the name of God. They were to be the official teachers of religion, but they were to have no monopoly of that privilege, for parents were to teach their children at home. The priests needed, therefore, to be holy. While there was nothing in those impressive ordination rites to guarantee such holiness, still those rites were ordained of God to show the necessity for such holiness; and, like our own ordination ceremonies, they brought a blessing from God to every priest who entered into them in the spirit of faith and love.

Such an ideal of holiness, however, was too high for certain of the priests (Lev. 10). Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire, in some way which is not clear to us, but which must have involved deliberate, sacrilegious departure from the fundamental ideals of their holy faith. The account of their sin and of its punishment is followed immediately by a warning to the priests against drinking wine or strong drink; such drinking may have caused the sin of Nadab and Abihu. If so, it was not the last time that drink has brought promising churchmen down to the grave in shame.

The heart of the teachings here is that the priest must be holy, somewhat as God Himself is holy. Unholiness on the part of any of the servants of God is

sad, but on the part of His chosen representatives it is doubly reprehensible.

IV. The People: Their Need of Holiness
(Lev. 11-16)

The Hebrew religion existed primarily to make the people holy, and to keep them holy. They had no double standard of morality, no "ethical bi-metallism," with one exacting ethical system for the priests, and an easier one for ordinary people. Their religion regulated their everyday life, including their eating and drinking, and all of their activities, by day and by night. For example, it took possession of them, and dealt rigourously with them, when they were ill, and especially when they had contracted the leprosy. They never found it easy to be holy, but, thank God, it was always possible.

God's people were to keep their hearts and their hands free from everything which would defile, and they were to draw a sharp line between the times when they were clean and the times when they were unclean. Whether the occasions of such uncleanness were deliberate or unavoidable, God's people were to seek purification, the exact method of which depended upon the nature of the uncleanness. A person who contracted defilement, however, through no fault of his own, was free from any moral stigma; just as a person today who becomes tubercular must suffer inconvenience for a misfortune which is not sinful. Such precautions are familiar to us, especially in days of war, because of sanitary considerations, but to the Hebrews they were object lessons in holiness.

These messages about holiness culminate in the account of the annual Day of Atonement (Lev. 16).

This is the most vital passage in the book. The chief characteristic of the Day of Atonement was the all-inclusive sacrifice for the sins of the people throughout the past year, thus reminding them that they had fallen far short of ideal holiness, and that they must throw themselves upon the mercy of God. This was the only fast day prescribed by the Hebrew law. It was the Hebrew New Year's Day, and it makes us Christians think of the Supreme Sacrifice upon Calvary. Perhaps we ought to restore the fast day of our fathers, setting apart every year one entire day for rest from labour, for fasting, and for confession of the sins of the twelve months gone.

On the Day of Atonement the High Priest laid aside his ornate robes, and arrayed himself in white; then he made atonement for himself and the other priests by a sin offering. He took two goats, and cast the lot to determine which of them was to be slain. After using this sacrificial goat to make the sin offering for his people, he entered the Holy of Holies, which he alone was permitted to enter, and he but once a year. There he completed the acts symbolizing atonement. Then he took the live goat, laid his hands upon its head, confessed over it the sins of the people, and sent it out into the wilderness by a man who was in waiting. Thus the two goats symbolized, respectively, the forgiveness of sins, and the removal of guilt—the blessings symbolized for us in the Lord's Supper and in baptism.

V. The Law of Holiness: Practical Religion (Lev. 17-26)

This last portion of the book is not all of equal interest to us. It enjoins the Hebrews not to eat blood,

LEVITICUS 23	TIME OF YEAR	DURATION	ATTENDANTS	CHARACTER- ISTICS	ANALOGY
<i>Sabbath</i>	Every week	Sunset to sunset	Everyone	Rest; worship	Lord's Day
<i>Passover</i>	Mar.-Apr.	7 days (including feast unleavened bread)	All males (over 12)	Family sacrament; at night; unleavened bread; (later) wine	Lord's Supper
<i>Pentecost</i> (Feast of Weeks)	May-June	1 day	All males (over 12)	Sabbath rest; convocation; first-fruits offered	Thanks-giving
<i>Trumpets</i>	Sept.-Oct.	1 day	—	Sabbath rest; convocation; sacrifices	New Year's
<i>Atonement</i>	Oct.	1 day	—	Two goats; atonement in Holy of Holies	Fast Day
<i>Tabernacles</i>	Oct.	7 days	All males (over 12)	Booths; sacrifices; festivities	Camp Meeting
<i>Jubilee</i>	Every 50th year	Entire year	Everyone	Rest; restitution; festivities	Heaven(?)

THE HEBREW FEASTS, OR FESTIVALS

because it is a symbol of life; and it forbids marriage between persons closely related. One passage here (18:18) was formerly the occasion of controversy, because it was supposed to forbid a man to marry his deceased wife's sister, whereas it merely forbids his marriage with the sister while the first wife is yet living.

One chapter here (Lev. 19) moves upon as high an ethical plane as any other part of the Old Testament. Here is the key verse of the book (19:2), and here is the inspired original of the Master's second great commandment: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself; I am Jehovah" (19:18). This second clause, "I am Jehovah," is typical of the book, for it shows that morality is based upon religion. This chapter is notable, also, for naming the mother before the father; for setting apart the gleanings of the vineyard and of the harvest to feed the poor and the sojourner; for warnings against stealing and lying, as well as against oppressing one's neighbour, and against keeping over night the wages of a hired servant. Such morality is still inseparable from our holy faith.

Those people were principally farmers, and their religious festivals (Lev. 23) were arranged so as to interfere as little as possible with seedtime and harvest, or with the busy season in caring for cattle and sheep, and still to afford them fixed seasons of respite from toil. (See the chart on the opposite page.) When the people came together they offered sacrifices, and then they mingled freely among their relatives and friends from far and near, much as our fathers used to set apart the season between the harvest and the fall plowing, so as to gather in the open air for social worship

and for human fellowship. Such red-letter days did much to break up the monotony of life on the farm, thus showing even the little children that religion is primarily a matter of joy.

VI. Practical Lessons from Leviticus

Conditions today are vastly different, but still this book affords certain practical suggestions. The church building, for example, should be placed on the best lot in the community, in the midst of the people to be served. The structure should be carefully planned, and well built, out of the best materials available, with due regard to sanitation and to quiet beauty; and it should be kept immaculate. In the words of James Robertson, as he pleaded with Scotch Canadians to erect in every community a fitting house of worship, "The kirk alone gives visibility and permanence to religion in the local community." The appearance of the local church should never bring a blush of shame to our sons and daughters when they come home from college and university. Only our best is good enough for the worship of God.

The most important hour in all the week is the hour which we set apart for the public worship of God, and the most important hour of public worship is that in which we celebrate the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The purpose of the Church is to bring men and women into right relations with God, and with each other, through Jesus Christ, and so the crowning glory of the Christian Church is her Gospel of divine pardon and cleansing. Instead of confusing simplicity with slovenliness, therefore, we ought to make ready for such high privileges of worship with as much loving care as the

priests and Levites bestowed upon their preparations for sacrifice.

The chief lesson of the book, however, relates to holiness, both on the part of the minister and of the people. Every Christian is a priest, but the pastor is serving as a priest in a special manner whenever he prays for his people, and above all when he administers the sacraments. The ideal pastor, then, is a lover of God and a lover of men. As a good shepherd, he knows all of his sheep, and he is especially concerned about the little lambs, the aged and the weak, as well as those who have strayed from the fold.

The people, likewise, need to be holy, somewhat as God Himself is holy. They ought to be different from the world, and better by far, in their work, at their play, and everywhere. They ought to carry their religion into every nook and cranny of their lives, and not least into their every-day business. Christians ought to set before the world the loftiest ethical standards, but ever in the spirit of humility and of love.

This book shows us, too, that in the Church we should minister to all of the spiritual and the social needs of the men and the women, old and young, and especially the children, for whose welfare the Lord holds us responsible. Unlike the ancient Hebrews, we are free from exact regulations, but with our Christian freedom we ought to serve the local communities all the more effectively. To that end God is waiting to guide us today, just as surely as He guided His servants of old by the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire.

Suggestions for Review and for Discussion

1. Make a drawing of the Tabernacle and furnishings.
2. Discuss the use of object lessons in teaching.

3. Why do we not offer animal sacrifices today?
4. Compare Hebrew and Christian ideas of holiness.
5. Compare a modern pastor and an ancient priest.
6. How can we make installation services impressive?
7. Is the Roman Catholic ritual derived from Leviticus?
8. Should a pastor be more holy than his people?
9. Which Hebrew feast was most like a Bible conference?
10. Discuss the duty of your congregation to your community.

Note.—See the questions under Genesis (p. 32).

Memorable Chapters: Leviticus 8, 16, 19.

IV

NUMBERS: DISLOYALTY IN THE WILDERNESS

NO book of similar length in the Bible is more neglected than Numbers, partly because it reveals the frailty of human nature. It shows how the Children of Israel fell short of the ideals which God had set before them in the founding of the home, the state and the church. This book deals with the experiences of the Hebrews during the forty years in the wilderness, while they were being disciplined for entering the promised land. Again and again they murmured against God and against Moses, and the record of their murmurings affords unpleasant reading. Some knowledge of this book, however, is essential to an understanding of Hebrew history.

Numbers does not lend itself readily to an outline, for it includes two different sorts of literature: the narrative here is the continuation of Exodus; and the legislation resembles that of Leviticus. For convenience in study, however, we may divide the book chronologically into three parts: the first deals with the events of a few days just before the Children of Israel departed from Mount Sinai; the second, with the experiences of the thirty-eight years which they spent in the wilderness of Paran; the third, with the

events of a few months in the plain of Moab, on the threshold of the promised land.

I. Preparing to Leave Sinai (Num. 1:1-10:10)

First of all came the census, from which the book derives its popular title. This census included all males of twenty years and beyond; that is, all who were mature enough to go to war. The largest tribe was Judah, and the total for all the tribes was 603,550, which would indicate a mixed multitude of approximately two million. Such a multitude needed to be organized, both when in camp and when on the march. The old tribal distinctions were maintained, and the twelve tribes were grouped in four grand divisions, three tribes to a division, according to their natural affinities, with one tribe responsible for two others. On each of the four sides of the Tabernacle three of these tribes were to encamp, always in the same relative positions. The order of the tribes on the march was prescribed with equal care: six preceded the Tabernacle, and six followed, so that the Tabernacle, as the visible symbol of the presence of God, was ever in the midst of the people.

Such regulations were necessary because of the old inter-tribal jealousies; and for the same reason the duties and the privileges of the priests and the Levites had to be carefully defined. These two orders represented the thirteenth tribe, that of Levi. The priests were superior to the Levites, and the high priest to the other sons of Aaron. Men who handle holy things are often unduly sensitive about questions of rank and precedence. To prevent disputes there was a careful division of labour, so that each of these holy men knew

the limits of his own office. For the same reason their respective locations about the Tabernacle, whether in camp or on the march, were carefully specified. And still they quarrelled, as we shall see!

The people, likewise, needed to be reminded of their call to be holy. They were carefully to segregate every leper, and every person suspected of leprosy. They were to deal rigorously with persons guilty of impurity, especially in breaking the marriage vow, for adultery was a besetting sin of the ancient Hebrews. Occasionally one of them would assume the vows of the Nazirite, either for himself or for his child. These vows were three: to abstain from wine and strong drink; to keep the head unshorn; and to touch no dead thing (Num. 6). Samson was a Nazirite, and perhaps also John the Baptist.

Before they finally bade farewell to Sinai the Hebrews celebrated the Passover, the first anniversary of their deliverance from Egypt (Num. 9). Since attendance at the Passover was compulsory, and since those who had been defiled could not share in its privileges, a supplementary Passover was arranged. The requirements of that ancient régime were exacting, but they were never arbitrary or unreasonable.

In the midst of these regulations shines out one of the fairest passages in the Pentateuch, showing that holiness was no mere matter of compliance with an exacting ritual, but that it was the people's response to the lovingkindness of God. This priestly blessing, with its beautiful phrases, reminds us of the apostolic benediction, with its three-fold blessings: the love of God the Father, the grace of Jesus Christ His Son, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

*"Jehovah bless thee and keep thee;
Jehovah make his face shine upon thee, and be
gracious unto thee;
Jehovah lift up his countenance upon thee, and give
thee peace" (6:24-26).*

Equally impressive is the narrative about the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. This was God's way of showing His people whether they were to tarry where they were encamped, or to journey forth into the wilderness. Like ourselves, they never knew what a day would bring forth, as they "nightly pitched their moving tents a day's march nearer home." But they knew that ever with them was the Covenant God. We, too, need to learn to trust God for the blessings of the unknown future, and so we ought frequently to sing the various hymns suggested by the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire; such as "Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah."

II. Sojourning in the Wilderness *(Num. 10:11-21:35)*

We sing about the wilderness as though the Hebrews were ever on the march, with banners streaming and trumpets blaring, "Marching through the desert, joyfully we sing!" Nothing could be farther from the facts! It is true that they had standards, one for each of the four main divisions, as well as an ensign for each tribe; and that they marched more or less. But it is probable that they spent the most of their days in camp, for if they had followed a straight course they could have journeyed from Sinai to the Jordan in a few weeks (*cf.* Deut. 1:2). They seem not to have wandered about perpetually, but rather to have encamped in various spots, notably Kadesh-Barnea, for

considerable periods of time, and many of them must have been scattered out over the open country in quest of pasturage for their flocks and herds.

This book is concerned, however, not with places and with times, but with the morale of the people. Numbers is a study in mass psychology, and as a whole the picture is dark, although occasionally there is a gleam of light. Hobab, for instance, showed a commendable spirit in his response to the invitation of Moses. When Moses said, "Come thou with us and we will do thee good" (10:29), Hobab was not much impressed; doubtless he was too busy. But when Moses said, "Thou shalt be to us instead of eyes," Hobab was interested. He was not a youth, but his attitude towards the invitation of Moses was like that of many a young man today, who wishes to serve. If we talked more to our young folk about what we wish them to do with us in the Church, instead of trying to "hold" them, as though they were little babes, we might transform the so-called young people's problem into an opportunity.

This part of the book, however, consists chiefly of accounts of repeated murmurings, and of various punishments. At Taberah the people murmured because of their monotonous diet, and they were punished by lightning (Num. 11). Miriam and Aaron murmured against Moses because of his wife, and Miriam was visited with leprosy. Moses showed his meekness (12:3) by praying for her, and she was healed. The people murmured against God and against Moses when the ten spies reported that there was no hope of conquering the land of Canaan (Num. 13); and when the two loyal spies, Caleb and Joshua, reported that the

Hebrews could conquer that land, if only they had faith in God, "All the congregation bade stone them with stones."

Such murmurings were severely punished because they were tokens of increasing disloyalty to God, and of an increasing desire on the part of the people to return to Egypt. Had it not been for the prayers of Moses (Num. 14), the people would have been destroyed. God forgave them once again, but He told His servant Moses that they would need to tarry in the wilderness for forty years. Soon rebellion broke out in a different guise, under the leadership of Korah, a Levite, with Dathan, Abiram and On, members of the tribe of Reuben, all of whom were jealous of Moses and Aaron (Num. 16). Such a conspiracy reminds us of the infamous Cabal against General Washington.

At Meribah the people murmured because of their thirst (Num. 20), and when Moses struck the rock twice, the waters gushed forth; but because of his presumption in not obeying the word of God implicitly, he was not permitted to enter the promised land. Once again, the people murmured because of their food and drink (Num. 21), and they were visited with the fiery serpents. When they repented Moses set up the brazen serpent, about which the Master spoke as a symbol of the Cross. Unless human nature has changed from those days of old (and it has not!), surely men need the Cross!

III. On the Threshold of the Promised Land (Num. 22-36)

At last the Children of Israel stood in the plain of Moab, from which they were soon to enter the land

of Canaan. Their presence aroused the fears of Balak, the King of Moab, who imported from the East a prophet named Balaam, to pronounce curses upon Israel. But after prolonged negotiations with Balak, the imported prophet, almost against his will, pronounced upon Israel a series of blessings, culminating in a vision of the coming Redeemer (24:17). Balaam is an object lesson of a man who strives to evade the call of God, and who compromises between lofty moral idealism and sordid practical politics. Some of the details here are difficult to disentangle, but the judgment against Balaam is uttered by three New Testament writers, and it has been echoed by the strongest preachers of the Christian Church.

Immediately after these prophecies of Balaam, and probably because of them, the Israelites fell into the foulest sin, and so they endured another plague (Num. 25). Then followed a second census, and the choice of a leader to succeed Moses. The prayer of Moses for divine guidance would serve as a fitting model for any congregation in need of a pastor (27:15-17). The Lord chose Joshua, a man in whom was the Spirit, and so the good work which Moses had accomplished was certain to go on after he had fallen asleep.

The practical wisdom of Moses appeared (Num. 32) when the tribes of Reuben and Gad, with the half tribe of Manasseh, requested that they be allotted lands east of the Jordan, which were suitable for grazing. Moses replied that it would not be fair to the other tribes if these were excused from the conquest of Canaan. So they suggested that they share in the conquest, but that they be permitted to leave their families with their flocks and herds on the eastern side,

which would later become their home. Moses gladly assented, and thus averted possible disruption.

Another bright chapter (Num. 35) tells of the cities of refuge, three of which were to be located on each side of the Jordan. The districts on the eastern side would be sparsely settled, but for that very reason they would need sanctuaries easily accessible. Those cities of refuge were not designed to save from punishment any man who deserved to suffer, but rather to protect from the avenger of blood every innocent victim of circumstances. Here is another token that the Hebrews were far in advance of other ancient peoples in guaranteeing to unfortunate folk the rights of human beings. Hebrew laws were fundamentally just, and they were tempered with mercy, because they came from God.

The ordinary life of the Israelites in the wilderness was dreary, and doubtless many of their temptations were due to the monotony of living. They had many hardships, too. But still there was no sufficient reason for their disloyalty to God and to His servant Moses. Apart from a single act of presumption, Moses stands out in this book as one of the strongest and best men of all history, and towering above him, as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, is Jehovah God Himself, who is the principal character in the Book of Numbers.

Suggestions for Review and for Discussion

1. Trace the probable course of the Hebrews through the wilderness.
2. Does the literary style of Numbers suit its contents?

3. Account for the jealousy between the priests and Levites.
4. Account for the unfavourable report of the ten spies.
5. Why are murmurings against providence common today?
6. Why is it hard to be good when idle?
7. Make a drawing to show the positions of the various tribes when in camp; when on the march.
8. Write briefly about the educational value of hardships.
9. Write a brief character sketch of Balaam.
10. Should we sing of these journeys as a type of progress towards heaven?

Note.—See the questions under Genesis (p. 32).

Memorable Passages: Numbers 6:24-27; 10:29-32; 24:17.

V

DEUTERONOMY: A PLEA FOR LOYALTY TO GOD

THE Book of Deuteronomy deserves to be better known. It seldom finds its way into our sermons and Bible school lessons, because it does not deal with striking personalities and with stirring events. But, purely as literature, it deserves to rank with Genesis, The Psalms and Isaiah as the Major Four in the Old Testament. The style here is as eloquent as that of the greatest prophets, and it is notable for simplicity and beauty, as well as for a prose rhythm like the flowing of a river. Thus it bodies forth the personality and the enthusiasm of the inspired speaker. Such moving words should be read aloud, and the most beautiful of them committed to memory, so as to reproduce something of the impression upon the hearts of those who first yielded to their spell.

Professor R. G. Moulton, a lifelong student of world literature, once read in succession the mightiest of the orations of Burke and of Demosthenes, and then he read Deuteronomy, laying it down assured that it is the noblest oration of all time. The ordinary way to approach this inspired eloquence is to take up these farewell addresses of Moses, one by one; but since they differ much in length and in importance, a better way is to divide the book into three parts of

almost equal length, each of which forms a logical unit of study.

I. The Spiritual Interpretation of History
(Deut. 1-11)

This first portion of the book is chiefly hortatory, showing the light which the past experiences of the Hebrews, especially in the wilderness, throw upon their future pathway in the promised land. "Remember!" "Beware lest thou forget!" These words of Moses may have suggested the refrain of Kipling's *Recessional*, but the spirit of the ancient seer was different from that of the modern bard, and higher. Moses was concerned with history chiefly as the unfolding of the redemptive purposes of God. He insisted that Jehovah had ever been true to His Covenant, and that His people had often been untrue to Him, but that He was still waiting to make the future of His people more than worthy of their past. Such is the mighty appeal of the past, as an inspiration for loyalty in the present and of hope for the future. Here is the background for an anniversary sermon, such as that of the Rev. Dr. Charles Lee, in reviewing his ministry of two score years in the Presbyterian Church at Carbondale, Pa., "Forty Years of Mercy!"

Such an appeal owes its effectiveness largely to the personality of the speaker, and to the dignity of the occasion. In Deuteronomy the speaker is Moses, the practical idealist, and the occasion calls for his farewell address, somewhat like that of George Washington. Such an address gathers up the choicest recollections of a lifetime, and renders them immortal. As the prophet reviews the forty years in the wilderness, and

as he looks over into the unknown future in the promised land, which his own feet are never to touch, he compresses into a few hours the God-given counsels for coming days. His appeal assumes many forms, but the heart of his message is ever the same. With the "significant repetition" of a master orator he pleads with his people as a father would plead with his children, entreating them to be loyal to their Covenant God.

After a brief retrospect of their history, Moses summons his people in memory back to Mount Sinai, and he recapitulates the Ten Commandments (5:1-27), in a form slightly different from that in Exodus, because specially adapted to the needs of the new day which is about to dawn. In the fourth commandment, for example, instead of thinking of the creation as a reason for keeping the Sabbath, as in Exodus, the Hebrews are to remember their own bondage in Egypt as a motive for granting their servants the weekly day of rest. And in the tenth commandment, they are to give precedence to the "neighbour's wife" over the "neighbour's house," because in this book personal rights take precedence over property rights. In all essentials, however, this new version of the Ten Commandments is the same as that in Exodus, and so this Law affords the solid rock on which the nation must build.

One of the dominant notes in this book is obedience, and that is coupled with fear (5:29 *et p.*). Obedience and fear, however, are to be rendered to God by His loving children. Just as loving obedience is the first lesson which little tots learn in the home, so was it the first lesson which the Children of Israel needed to learn before they crossed over into the promised land. Just

as little children need to learn to honour their father and mother, so did those childlike people need to learn to revere God.

Love for God is the keynote of the greatest passage in the book (6:4-9). With these inspired words every Hebrew child began his mastery of the Scriptures, and with them every Christian child today should be familiar. With these words every loyal Hebrew in later times confessed his faith, much as many Christians now repeat the Apostles' Creed. This Hebrew Creed profoundly influenced the beginnings of Christianity. For example, when a man skilled in the interpretation of the Jewish law, striving to entrap the Lord Jesus, said to Him, "Master, which is the greatest commandment in the law?" the Master quoted the heart of these words from Deuteronomy (Matt. 22:34-40). When another lawyer asked Him a like question, He requested the lawyer to answer it himself, and he did so by reciting a part of this creed. The Master accepted this working description of religion, and then He threw upon the ancient Hebrew Creed a flood of heavenly light (Luke 10:25-37).

These words about loving God are noble, but they are not enough. So the Master supplemented them with words from Leviticus: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Love thy God supremely, and love thy neighbour as thyself. "On these two commandments the whole law hangeth, and the prophets" (Matt. 22:40). Religion, then, brings a man into right relations, both with his God and with his fellow men. Such a religion enables a man to make the most of himself, as a child of God and a servant of his fellow men. But in these two command-

ments the emphasis is ever upon the first: "Thou shalt love Jehovah thy God."

"Thy God!" This phrase, or its equivalent, occurs in Deuteronomy more than three hundred times, thus revealing the close personal relation between God and His children, both individually and collectively. Such "ethical monotheism" is the greatest contribution of the Old Testament to the modern world. There is only one God, and He claims the undivided allegiance of men. He appeals for the sort of loyalty which springs from love. Such a religion centres in the heart, though it likewise appeals to the intellect; and it should begin with the little child. In the godly home, with its religious training of children, the enduring foundations of the national life are laid.

The Training of Children in Religion

The ideals of Deuteronomy differ from certain of our modern "institutionalized methods." Both the father and the mother are to consider the training of their children their first duty, and they are to perform that duty largely in the home. Parents themselves must love God, and they must train their children to love Him. Hence they encourage their little ones to commit to memory large portions of the Bible, and at their meals, as well as by the wayside, they talk familiarly with their boys and girls about the goodness of God as revealed in their daily lives. Such lofty ideals of fatherhood and motherhood are not now easy to follow; they never were easy to follow; but they are worth following at any cost. (Cf. *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, by Burns; and *The Autobiography of John G. Paton*.)

In teaching children to love God, wise parents appeal to eye-gate as well as to ear-gate. The Hebrews wrote upon their garments and their persons, as well as upon their doorposts and their gates, carefully selected portions of Scripture, so that their children might ever behold visible reminders of the faith. Thus they anticipated modern psychology, which shows that children learn more quickly and more largely from what they see than from what they hear. Hence it is well to place in every room of a Christian home a visible evidence of the religion which permeates its life; it may be a copy of Sargent's *Prophets*, or of Hoffmann's *Head of Christ*.

The best home training in religion is given and received unconsciously. "Religion is caught, not taught," as we learn from Horace Bushnell and John Ruskin, each of whom was reared in a home atmosphere of love and peace and joy. Such a home religion is contagious; it works quietly seven days in the week, and it does for growing children what a brief hour in the Bible school cannot do, even though it be supplemented by additional hours of Bible teaching in the public schools. Is not this a fair inference from the teachings of Deuteronomy?

Moses next turns to the kindred subject of temptation, reminding the Children of Israel that for two score years God has been "proving" them, and that they have repeatedly sinned. Here are the three verses which the Master employs in replying to the tempter, thus using the sword of the Spirit to repel the assaults of the evil one. In each of His three replies the emphasis falls upon the word "God" (Matt. 4:1-11). The value of such an appeal depends primarily upon

the moral character of God. According to this book He is holy, and He requires His children to be holy. Hence this first portion of the book closes with a dramatic contrast between the joys of those who serve God, and the woes of those who serve Him not (11:26-32).

II. The Practical Workings of Religion (*Deut. 12-26*)

The characteristic fact here is the central sanctuary (Deut. 12). While in the wilderness the Hebrews associated worship with the Tabernacle, and in the promised land they would need one central sanctuary, at which they would present all their sacrifices. This plan was a safeguard against idolatry. In Canaan almost every community had its local shrine, or high place, where the people engaged in unspeakably foul practices in homage to their deity, or Baal. As the Hebrews occupied the various communities, they would be tempted to take over these local shrines, and so after a while they might have had almost as many deities, proportionately, as the people of India, who are said to worship three hundred and thirty million gods.

This central portion of the book consists largely of the inspired repetition of ordinances previously given, showing that the Hebrew religion was exacting, but still that it was primarily one of joy. For example, according to our modern standards, loyal Hebrews were generous in supporting their religion. In addition to their tithes, which were prescribed, they brought free-will offerings. They were not "free" to refrain from bringing gifts, for they were never to appear

before the Lord empty-handed; but after they had paid their tithes, which were debts to God, they were to bring such gifts as their hearts prompted, and as their circumstances warranted.

In like manner, many Christians today accept the tithe as the minimum standard for estimating their contributions to the Lord's work, and then they gladly bring free-will offerings. Wherever such Christians abound, the work of the Lord prospers, and the poor are fed. For in Deuteronomy these regulations about tithes and free-will offerings appear in connection with regulations about the care of the needy (14:22-29). Pure religion is applied religion!

In the midst of these regulations about worship shines forth one of the fairest Messianic passages in the Old Testament (18:15-19). This passage is notable for what it tells about Moses as the prophet of God: he was the ambassador of God to the people from whom he had sprung. In future times God promised to raise up another Prophet, like unto Moses; this was the Lord Jesus. The prophets were the mightiest men of old, and in certain respects Moses was the greatest of them all. The loftiest tribute ever paid to him, however, was in being held up before his own people as a type of the one Ideal Prophet.

III. Closing Appeals and Exhortations (Deut. 27-34)

This last portion of the book begins by telling about the curses, or inspired warnings, to be pronounced from Ebal, and the blessings, or inspired promises, from Gerizim. These were twin mountains west of the Jordan. Six tribes were to stand on Ebal, to utter the

curses, and six on Gerizim, to invoke the blessings, so that the two mountains represented what our fathers styled the terrors of the Law and the promises of the Gospel. When this dramatic ceremony was later enacted (Josh. 8:30-35), it must have impressed upon the heart of every beholder the folly of disobeying Jehovah, and the blessedness of doing His will.

Here is a timely warning against prying into the unknown: "The secret things belong unto Jehovah our God; but the things that are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law" (29:29). What a rebuke for some of our Bible study! Still more significant is the revelation of the "inwardness" of true religion: instead of thinking of God's will as arbitrary, and of His word as far away—in the heavens or across the sea—His people are to find it within themselves. "The word is nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it" (30:11-20).

*"Speak to Him thou, for He hears,
And Spirit with spirit can meet;
Closer is He than breathing,
And nearer than hands or feet."*

Such a religion makes men brave and strong (31:1-8), for the secret of courage is faith in God. The children of God should be bold, not because their foe is weak, but because their God is strong. This appeal for courage made a lasting impression upon the heart of Joshua, and it must have inspired the great body of the Hebrews. They knew that Moses was a man of faith, and that his religion had enabled him to live without worry, to work without hurry, and to look forward without fear. Such courage is contagious.

The Song of Moses (Deut. 32) employs the recurrent figure of the Rock, to symbolize the strength and the quietness of God. This poem gives us familiar phrases: "As an eagle that stirreth up her nest"; "Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked"; "Their rock is not our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges." Here, also, is the Blessing of Moses (Deut. 33), with its beautiful phrases: "The good will of him that dwelt in the bush"; "As thy days, so shall thy strength be"; "The eternal God is thy dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms." These two poems, with their appeals for loyalty to God, seem to have been the last public utterances of Moses, before he went out to die upon Mount Nebo, alone with his God.

IV. The Later History of the Book

"Literature is writing which endures after the conditions which produced it have passed away" (Wendell). Then surely Deuteronomy is literature! These eloquent addresses persuaded the Children of Israel to renew their pledges of loyalty to God, and encouraged them to follow Joshua as their leader in the conquest of Canaan. But in later times this book, or roll, disappeared mysteriously, and it was practically forgotten.

About 621 B. C., however, more than six hundred years after the death of Moses, this scroll was discovered in the Temple by Hilkiyah the priest (II Kings 22), and when its teachings were made known to King Josiah, he inaugurated a moral and spiritual reformation. Under his predecessor, Manasseh, the worst of the kings of Judah, society had become so corrupt that it was ready for destruction, but because of the reviving influence of Deuteronomy, the fall of Judah was de-

layed. Such a national awakening seems like life from the dead.

This book profoundly influenced the beginnings of Christianity. In the New Testament it is quoted more than ninety times, and its impress is found on many a page where its words do not appear. For example, as we have seen, when our Lord wished to express in few words the heart of religion, He turned to Deuteronomy; and when the Jews asked Him, "Art thou that prophet?" they were thinking of the promise in this book. It is no exaggeration, therefore, to say with a modern scholar, "Deuteronomy is one of the epoch-making books of the world;" and with another, "There are few books in the Old Testament, the regular exposition of which will more profit a Christian preacher and his congregation."

"Deuteronomy is a living and a divine book. . . . It gives utterance to truths which are always and everywhere sovereign: that God is one, and that man is wholly His; that God is righteousness and faithfulness, mercy and love, and that these are also what He requires from us, towards Himself and one another; that His will lies not in any unseen height, but in the moral sphere, known and understood by all. Thus in the preparation for Jesus Christ, Deuteronomy stands very high. Did He not accept the divine authority both of its doctrine and of its style, by accepting its central Creed as the highest and ultimate Law, not only for Israel, but for all mankind?" (G. A. Smith).

V. The Character of Moses

"There hath not arisen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom Jehovah knew face to face" (Deut.

34:10). "Among the greatest mortals who ever walked this earth, Moses will always remain one of the greatest" (Cornill). Thus the Hebrew editor of Deuteronomy and the "liberal" scholar of Germany unite in their high estimate of Moses. Apart from the Apostle Paul, no mere man in history looms so large. In what respects, then, was he great?

Like the Apostle Paul, and King David, Moses was notable for the extent and variety of his gifts and graces. He was a leader of men, and a remarkable organizer. He found the Children of Israel with practically no organization, either political or religious, and a generation later he left them with the beginnings of the systems which were to endure throughout their history. This same man was the giver of the Law, which has formed the basis for all modern legislation. And he was pre-eminently a prophet, speaking and writing in a manner second to none of the holy men of God who wrote the Old Testament.

But Moses was even more notable for goodness than for greatness. Unlike many a great man, such as Napoleon, he was humble (Num. 12:3), and he became noted for his perseverance, for his calmness under trial, for his self-control, for his magnanimity, and for his undying love for his people. In other words, he was the unselfish servant of God (Heb. 3:1-5). The inspired writer to the Hebrews gathers all of his virtues up in a single bundle, and labels it faith. This was serving faith, as well as "saving faith." It was human weakness laying hold on divine power to supply all of its needs. It was the "victory that overcometh the world."

What, therefore, was the secret of this man's great-

ness and goodness? The five human elements which most influence character are heredity, environment, education, travel and friendships. In each of these respects Moses was rich. In the best sense, however, he was a self-made man. But the real secret of his greatness and goodness is to be found in his religion, especially after his experience at the Burning Bush. He was a man of faith, and so he was a man of prayer. Like Paul, Moses prayed as a matter of habit, and so in the zero hour he won great victories for his people. He prayed with a holy boldness; he prayed for others rather than himself; and he prayed hard. The prayer life of Moses! What an inviting field for Bible study!

Moses was the greatest man in olden days, and one of the best men of any time. And yet he was buried in an unknown grave! Why? Such an apparent anticlimax reminds us that the principal character in the Pentateuch is not Moses, but God, just as the principal character in the Acts is not Paul, but Christ. If we knew where Moses was buried, we might be tempted to worship there, but since the record of his life and work and writings closes with a few simple words by an unknown hand, we learn to keep our eyes fixed upon the Covenant God of the Hebrew people.

Suggestions for Review and for Discussion

1. Why read Deuteronomy aloud? How long does it take?
2. Write briefly about religion as loyalty.
3. Discuss the religious foundations of morality.
4. Why give religious education primarily in the home?
5. Explain the need for the central sanctuary.
6. Was Jesus a prophet like Moses (18:18)?

7. Appraise the social teachings in this book.
8. Comment on the boyhood of Moses in the light of Deut. 6:4-9.
9. What was the greatest event in the life of Moses?
10. Why does the world lack great men today?

Note.—See the questions under Genesis (p. 32).

Memorable Chapters: Deuteronomy 6, 8, 12, 18, 28, 30, 32.

The Hebrew Creed (Deut. 6:4-9)

“Hear, O Israel! Jehovah, our God, is one Jehovah; and thou shalt love Jehovah, thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words which I command thee this day shall be upon thy heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the doorposts of thy house, and upon thy gates.”

KEY VERSE	DESCRIPTIVE TITLE	SCENE OF ACTION	TIME COVERED	LITERARY STYLE	MODERN MESSAGE
Genesis 17:7	The Book of Beginnings	Mesopotamia Canaan Egypt	The Creation to the death of Joseph	Historical and biographical narrative	The Covenant God of the Home
Exodus 20:2	The Departure from the Land of Bondage	Egypt Sinai	The birth of Moses to the giving of the Law	Narrative — Ceremonial Legislation	The Covenant God of the Nation
Leviticus 19:2	Holiness: A Manual for the Priests	Sinai	A brief period at Sinai	Ceremonial Legislation	The Covenant God of the Church
Numbers 14:27	Murmurings in the Wilderness	Sinai; Wilder- ness of Paran; Plain of Moab	Almost 40 years (38+?)	Narrative — Ceremonial Legislation	Temptations to Disloyalty
Deuteronomy 6:4, 5	The Farewell Addresses of Moses	Plain of Moab (east of Jordan)	Forty days	Hortatory Addresses — Legislation	A People's Loyalty to God

A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE PENTATEUCH

VI

JOSHUA: SETTLING IN THE PROMISED LAND

THIS book differs from those preceding, because Moses has given way to a leader of a different type, and because the Hebrews are now engaged in the conquest of Canaan. Of the three parts in the book the first tells about the conquest, and is marked by stirring action; the second deals with the distribution of the land, and is not interesting to us; the third contains the farewell address of Joshua, and is the most vital part of the book. The keynote of the whole is Possession, and the key verse is, "Be strong and of good courage, for thou shalt cause this people to inherit the land which I swear unto their fathers to give them" (1:6).

I. The Conquest of Canaan (Josh. 1-12)

Think of the difficulties confronting the Hebrews as they looked over the Jordan into the promised land. First of all was the Jordan itself, and beyond it were hills and valleys which were always easy to defend and difficult to capture. The people of Canaan were fierce and warlike, and they were determined not to yield possession. More serious still, the Hebrews were unprepared for war: they were inexperienced; they were practically without horses or arms; they were inclined

to be individualistic; and they had not even learned to follow their new leader.

Under such circumstances the plan of attack was as wise as bold. Instead of striking from the south, as the Canaanites must have expected, the Hebrews went round and crossed the Jordan. Then they captured Jericho, thus driving a wedge into the centre of the land. Such generalship is like that of Napoleon. But the strategy of Joshua called for the use of unexpected agents, including the harlot Rahab (2:1-21 and 6:22-25), who helped in the capture of Jericho, and thus won a place in the Hebrew Hall of Fame (Heb. 11:31).

In crossing the Jordan (ch. 3) the Ark went before the people, and as soon as they had all passed over, Joshua set up in Gilgal a pillar to commemorate their triumph over the waters. Then all of the males born in the wilderness were circumcised, and the various households partook of the Passover, thus linking up the crossing of the Jordan with the deliverance from Egypt, just as the Lord's Supper today celebrates our deliverance from sin, and is specially appropriate after any signal triumph.

Was the crossing of the Red Sea made possible by a miracle? Historians tell us that in 1267 A. D., in the month of December, the waters in that same part of the Jordan were dammed up by a landslide, so as to permit the workmen to repair the foundations of a bridge, before the Moslem army could cross over. But the Book of Joshua clearly states that the Hebrews crossed over, not in December, when the Jordan is sometimes less than a hundred feet wide, but in April or May, at the time of the barley harvest, when it

overflows its banks and is often a mile in width. So God must have performed that wonder by the use of powers beyond our knowledge; but even if it could be shown that He employed what we term natural causes, still it was God who led His people safely through those waters, and He did it at His own appointed time.

After Joshua's faith had been strengthened by a theophany (5:13-15), he led his people against Jericho, compassing the city in silence once a day for six days, and seven times on the seventh day, with the Ark ever in the place of honour, because they were engaged in a holy war. On the seventh day, after the seventh circuit, the trumpets were sounded, the people shouted, and the walls fell down flat, so that every man went up into the city, straight over the portion of the wall nearest at hand. Those walls were substantial, as modern archæology shows, and yet they fell, because God caused them to fall. But we know not how. When once we accept the historic fact of the fall of Jericho, about which there is no question, and when we understand the divine cause, that is all we need to know.

Soon after the capture of Jericho the human element in history asserted itself in unexpected fashion (ch. 7). The band of Hebrews went out to capture Ai, but met with a decided repulse. Joshua took the matter to God in prayer, and learned that the defeat had been caused by sin. God had not failed His people, but His people had failed Him. Joshua's prayer is almost a model, but he learned that he needed to act. By means of the lot he traced the sin to a member of the tribe of Judah named Achan, who confessed that he had coveted

a portion of the spoil, which was to have been dedicated to the service of God; and that he had secreted it in his tent. So he was put to death as a traitor.

Then Joshua led his troops out against Ai (Josh. 8), and by means of an ambush he drew the warriors out of the town, setting it afire and vanquishing its army. The remainder of this first portion of the book recounts the experiences of the Israelites in conquering the land. They seem to have concentrated first upon the central portion, next upon the southern, and then upon the northern. But they made various sporadic attacks, for reasons which we cannot guess. Unfortunately, they failed to conquer the entire land, but left here and there alien peoples which were long to prove troublesome to the Hebrews. For example, they never occupied the future site of Jerusalem until David became their king.

II. The Distribution of the Land (Josh. 13-22)

The opening chapter here tells of a leader who is growing old, and of a land which is largely unconquered. But still that land was distributed among the various tribes, two and one half of them being allotted the territory east of the Jordan. The tribes on the western side may be classified geographically into three groups: the southern, the central and the northern. This geographical alignment was destined to play no small part in the future history of the Hebrews, especially in the Disruption, about 933 B. C.

The most noteworthy chapter here (Josh. 14) tells about Caleb. "We seldom meet him in the Bible, but we are always the better for the meeting." Caleb always stood out for the right, even if he stood alone.

He had served with Joshua throughout the forty years in the wilderness, and he had taken an active part in the conquest of Canaan; but when he was old he refused a reward for his services, asking rather for the privilege of conquering the most difficult portion of the hill country. So Joshua assigned to him Hebron, which was to become prominent in Hebrew history.

Such valiant men of faith as Joshua and Caleb were at their best in days of war, but their exploits raise serious moral problems. How could they lead their people in exterminating the Canaanites, and in possessing their lands; how could God command them to do so? According to the Sermon on the Mount, such deeds do not harmonize with what we know about the Heavenly Father. But those ancient Hebrews were not living in the light of the Sermon on the Mount, and of the Cross; so they must be judged according to the highest ethical standards of their own times.

The most satisfactory popular reply to such questions is that of the late Marcus Dods, in his little book, *Israel's Iron Age*, in which he says, in substance, that the Hebrews were simply entering the land which had long been promised to them; that they were the executioners of the wrath of God upon the most corrupt peoples in the ancient world; and that the consciousness of these two facts kept the people of God from becoming brutal. Like the followers of Gustavus Adolphus or of Cromwell, those Hebrews felt called of God to engage in a holy war. When they stooped to plunder, or otherwise forgot their high calling, they fell before the foe; but when they fought as the agents of God, they were invincible. Is there no lesson here for us?

III. Life's Greatest Permanent Choice (Josh. 23, 24)

Life's great permanent choices are four. First, whom shall I serve? Second, what shall I do? Third, whom shall I wed? Fourth, where shall we live? These four choices ought as a rule to be made in this order, and when made aright they go far to determine the paths in which one shall walk throughout life.

Joshua has long since chosen to serve the Lord, and in this farewell address he is pleading with his people to make the same momentous decision. So he urges them to remember the mercies of the Lord. "Not one thing hath failed, of all the good things which Jehovah your God spake concerning you." But Joshua warns them that they will lose their new land if they are disloyal to God, especially in committing idolatry. So he urges them to fear Jehovah, and to serve Him with sincere hearts, as His loyal children.

"Choose you this day whom ye will serve!" Thus the aged warrior summons his people to take their stand. If it seem evil to them to serve Jehovah, let them choose some other god, but as for Joshua and his household, they have long since chosen to serve Jehovah. These two active verbs are at the heart of our religion. Choose! Serve! Such religion is intensely practical, for its concerns the will and the life.

The people protested that they had already chosen to serve Jehovah, and that they would ever be loyal to Him—a vow which they were quickly to break. But Joshua reminded them that it is impossible, humanly speaking, to do the will of God. Still they protested that they would be true, and so he urged them to put away their idols, and to trust only in God. If they had lived in the light of Joshua's ideals for them, and if

their descendants had done so, their later history would have been different, and far more glorious.

IV. The Character of Joshua

Joshua was largely what Moses made him, for the older man displayed his practical wisdom in selecting the younger, and in training him to become the leader of Israel. Joshua was far less versatile than Moses, because the new tasks demanded less varied powers, but the two leaders were alike in strength and in courage. Joshua faced a tremendous task, apparently impossible, and he undertook the hardest part at the beginning, before he had become accustomed to leading the people, or they to following him. But he had the courage to undertake the impossible, and the perseverance to keep on until he had done it, by the grace of God. Such a spirit never knows defeat.

This man was notable, too, for his common sense. In making his plans for the conquest, and in carrying them through, he apparently received few special revelations, but still, with rare exceptions, he showed good judgment. Under God his success was largely due to his ability to get along with people, first winning their loyalty to himself as their leader, and then inspiring them to follow him in doing the will of God. The world needs such leaders today.

While Joshua was scarcely great, as Moses was great, the younger man made as much in proportion out of his two talents as the older man made out of his ten. Hence the personality of Joshua is not difficult to understand: the varied powers of the ten-talent man usually defy analysis; but the more simple gifts of the two-talent man are like our own. Joshua was willing

to be himself, rather than a weak imitation of Moses. This is "the simplicity which is towards Christ."

The real secret of Joshua's achievements was his faith. He believed in God, and he believed in his followers. He expected great things from them, and he attempted great things with them. He believed in himself as the servant of God and the leader of Israel. His faith was like that of Chinese Gordon, William of Orange, and many another man of war nearer home. Such faith is irresistible. "This is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith."

The name Joshua, "Jehovah Saves," is the Old Testament equivalent of our word Jesus. This fact invites a study of the resemblances and the contrasts between that ancient warrior and our own Prince of Peace. For the Lord Jesus Christ is "the Captain of our Salvation."

Suggestions for Review and for Discussion

1. Make a drawing of Canaan, showing the Jordan, Jericho, and other points of interest in this book.
2. Was Canaan desirable as a home for the Hebrews?
3. Write briefly about Rahab (Matt. 1:5; Heb. 11:31).
4. Why was Achan so severely punished?
5. Name the serious mistakes of Joshua.
6. Prepare a brief biographical sketch of Caleb.
7. Can you justify the conquest of Canaan?
8. Name other warriors notable for piety.
9. Contrast Joshua and Jesus.
10. Write about the importance of human leadership.

Note.—See the questions under Genesis (p. 32).

Memorable Chapters: Joshua 1, 6, 14, 24.

VII

JUDGES: POPULAR CHAMPIONS OF ISRAEL

THIS book is one of the most interesting in the Old Testament. "Other portions of Scripture are more important for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; but for merely human interest, for the lively touches of ancient manners, for the succession of romantic incidents, for the consciousness that we are living with the persons described, for the tragic pathos of events and characters—there is nothing like the history of the Judges from Othniel to Samson" (Stanley).

The Judges were the popular heroes of their times, because they were "the saviours" of their people. They lived in "Israel's Iron Age," after the death of Joshua and his generation, when the Hebrews had begun to go back, both morally and socially. They had largely forsaken the Covenant which Jehovah had made with their fathers, and had begun to worship idols. Their sons had begun to marry the daughters of the other peoples which still dwelt in the land. Consequently the Hebrews had become so weak that they were being oppressed by the people whom they should long since have driven out of the land.

But when the people cried unto Jehovah He raised up the Judges, one after another. These men were notable for their deeds: they were men of stirring

action, rather than of judicial temperament; they were more like Andrew Jackson and Theodore Roosevelt than like John Marshall and Mr. Taft. The Judges were twelve in number, but six of these are known to us only by name. The other six (the Major Judges) were Othniel, Ehud, Barak (including Deborah), Gideon, Jephthah and Samson. But ever back of these Judges was Jehovah God, who raised them up to set His people free.

In those troublous days the experiences of the Children of Israel tended to follow a sort of cycle, and so this book employs a set formula in describing the course of events under each of the Major Judges. For example, here is the framework of the narrative about Othniel: "The children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah . . . and the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Cushan-rishathaim . . . and they served Cushan-rishathaim eight years . . . and the children of Israel cried unto Jehovah and he raised up unto them a saviour . . . and Moab was subdued . . . and the land had rest forty years" (3:7-11).

Passing by Ehud we come to Deborah and Barak, who capture the imagination of the lover of adventure. Here the woman inspires the man, for while Barak goes forth to battle, Deborah buckles his armour on, as Ruskin would say; and another woman, Jael, strikes the decisive blow. Chapter four tells all of this in prose, and chapter five in verse. This war song of Deborah is one of the most moving in all literature. It exalts Jehovah because the leaders took the lead, and because the followers were volunteers. Thank God for such "resolves of heart"!

La Verne. California

POPULAR CHAMPIONS OF ISRAEL 99

This battle ode has given our modern speech more than a few deathless phrases. It breathes forth patriotic fervour and religious faith, a combination as attractive in verse as it is irresistible in battle. Over against the sacrificial spirit of the leaders and their followers, stands the cowardice and the shame of those who held back from the fight. The final impression of the song is all the more striking because of the lament of that alien mother as she sits in her mansion and looks out through the lattice for the return of her warrior son who has already fallen in the fight. Simply as literature, this song deserves to live forever.

The Best of the Judges (Chaps. 6-9)

When Gideon was called to set his people free from the yoke of Midian, he was threshing wheat in the winepress, to hide it from the foe. At first the young man hesitated; he wished to be sure that the call was from God. In his replies to the angel he showed that he was more concerned about his people than about himself, and that he was conscious of his own lack of importance. Such humility is no sin, and so God assured him of divine guidance, and also gave him a sign of his call to service.

Before Gideon started out on his larger work, he destroyed by night the altar of Baal on his father's farm, and thus he incurred the displeasure of the neighbours. But his father, who had doubtless worshipped at that shrine, came to his son's support, and taunted the irate neighbours because of the helplessness of their new god, thus anticipating the irony of Elijah on Mount Carmel (I Kings 18).

Such an initial victory gave the young man courage

to attempt more formidable conquests. When the hosts of Midian came in like a flood, the Spirit of Jehovah "clothed itself upon him," and he gathered about him the people of the surrounding tribes. But before he went out to battle he requested another sign, that of the fleece; and when it was granted, he asked that it be reversed. This also was granted by the ever patient God, and so Gideon was ready for his life work; but the people were not yet ready. They needed to learn to depend upon their God and not upon themselves.

If Gideon's entire host had gone out and conquered, they would have supposed that the victory was due to them, but when their numbers were reduced from 32,000 to 10,000, and then from 10,000 to 300, every one of them knew that their only hope was in God. From that winnowing they learned that God does not need the service of cowards, who wish that they were at home, or of dilettante dabblers, who carefully estimate the probabilities before they take a step at His command. He wishes men who fight His battles with glad abandonment. The modern word for such a spirit is enthusiasm, which means, literally, "God in us."

Gideon's heart was strengthened once more by the dream which he heard related one night in the camp of Midian; and so he divided his men into three bands of one hundred each, instructing them to advance upon the foe from three different directions, and at a given signal to make such an uproar that the enemy would flee. Thus that little Hebrew band put the hosts of Midian to rout with no loss of Hebrew blood. And when the victory seemed likely to result in the alienation of certain Israelites who had not shared in the exploit, Gideon showed his gifts of leadership, for by

his humility and his tact, as well as by a touch of humour, he conciliated these malcontents.

This man displayed his practical wisdom still more clearly when he declined to accept the kingship of Israel. Like George Washington, three thousand years later, Gideon would have become a strong, wise king, of whom his people would have been proud, but he knew that such a course was not best for his country. "I will not rule over you; neither shall my son rule oever you; God shall rule over you." But the people did not long permit God to have His way in their hearts, and so they soon lost their freedom.

After refusing the kingship, Gideon proved that he was far from perfect. Like Aaron of old, he asked for the earrings of his followers, that he might make an ephod. "And all Israel played the harlot there; and it became a snare unto Gideon and to his house." Gideon left behind him, too, the beginnings of endless trouble, because of his many wives and his many sons, the worst of whom was Abimelech. So that even Gideon was largely a man of his own times.

When Gideon died, Abimelech usurped the rôle of king, slew all of his father's sons, save Jotham, and ruled for three years. Then he died, like King Saul, as wretchedly as he had lived. The black record of his reign is brightened, however, by Jotham's fable of the trees choosing their king. This is one of the two fables in the Old Testament (cf. II Kings 14:9). In this fable the worthy son of Gideon rebuked the people for passing by the best men, and permitting the worst one to rule over them; or rather, he rebuked the best men for becoming engrossed in their own pursuits, and thus allowing the worst element to have its way.

So in many a city today the men of business are engrossed in their gain, the men of culture are intent upon their studies, and the lovers of pleasure are wrapped up in themselves, whereas the worst men are eagerly waiting to grasp the offices of public trust. Therefore the late Lord Bryce warned us that if America ever falls it will be chiefly because of corruption in our great cities, and Kossuth said that the rock on which our republic is most likely to split is popular indifference to public affairs. Such a state of corruption and of indifference, now as in the days of the Judges, is caused largely by irreligion.

Passing by Tola and Jair, we come to Jephthah, "the Othello of Israelitish history" (Judges 11). This mighty man rose above the barrier of illegitimate birth, and by his valour he set his people free from Ammon. But he is famous chiefly because of his vow. As he went forth to battle he vowed that if he gained the victory he would offer as a living sacrifice whatsoever came out from the doors of his home to meet him on his return. When he returned victorious he was greeted first by his daughter, whom he deeply loved; but, like King Herod in slaying John the Baptist, Jephthah had sworn to his hurt and he would not change.

The stoicism of such a father and the devotion of such a daughter were worthy of a nobler cause. This record vies for pathos with that about Abraham's trial, but yonder the son was spared, whereas here the daughter was slain, and needlessly. The God of the Hebrews never sanctioned the sort of living sacrifices which were common in Canaan. "Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body

for the sin of my soul? ” No! How much less, therefore, in fulfilment of a hasty vow?

The record about Jephthah shows the origin of our word shibboleth, meaning party cry, or pet phrase. Jephthah lived in Gilead, east of the Jordan. After he and his followers had defeated Ammon, the Ephraimites, who lived west of the Jordan, falsely accused him of failing to ask their aid in the warfare, and they threatened to burn the houses of Gilead. So there was a sort of civil war, in which the men of Ephraim were worsted. When their fugitives came to the ford in the river the men of Gilead asked each of them to pronounce the word shibboleth, and if he said sibboleth, they knew that he was from Ephraim, and they put him to death. What a rough and bloody time!

The World's Greatest Athlete (Judges 13-16)

The hero of many a growing boy is Samson, partly because of his feats of strength, and likewise because of his practical jokes. Unlike the other Major Judges, he went out against the foe single-handed. Thus he began that conflict with the Philistines which was to continue until they were subdued by David. Samson rendered a useful service, and he is enrolled among the heroes of faith in the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews, but his life and work lay on a lower level than that of Gideon or Jephthah.

Samson was the child of faith. His father and mother had long gone childless, and when the wife learned that she was to become a mother, she told her husband, who uttered that beautiful prayer, “ Teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born.” So they dedicated their babe to God as a Nazirite,

somewhat as parents now dedicate a son to the Gospel ministry. He was to refrain from wine and strong drink, and he was to permit no razor to touch the hair of his head (cf. Num. 6:1-8).

But when Samson became a man, his religion proved to be largely external. He was strong against men but weak with women. His three adventures in love were with women of the Philistines, with whom he should have had nothing to do. The first was with the woman whom he persisted in wedding, despite the protests of his parents; and the ensuing entanglements would seem ludicrous, had not the results been disastrous. The second was with a harlot in Gaza, and resulted in his carrying off the gate of the city. The third was with Delilah, who was as shrewd as she was sinful.

Purely as literature, this narrative is unsurpassed. Note the diabolical cunning with which Delilah leads him on, little by little, until at last she exclaims, "How canst thou say, 'I love thee!' when thy heart is not with me? Thou hast mocked me these three times, and hast not told me wherein thy great strength lieth." "When she pressed upon him daily with her words, and urged him, his soul was vexed unto death. And he told her all his heart" (16:15-17). What a masterly use of sixty brief words! Cut any one of them and it will bleed!

The tragedy reached its height in the succeeding scene. "She made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and shaved off the seven locks of his head, and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him. And she said, 'The Philistines are upon thee, Samson!' And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, 'I will go out as at other times, and will

shake myself free! ' But he knew not that Jehovah had departed from him." And so that mighty hero, now "poor, wretched, blind," was led away to the prison house, there to toil as he never had toiled before, and at times even to afford amusement for the lords and ladies of the land.

In "Samson Agonistes," Milton has sung about the humiliation of that blind athlete toiling at the mill, but not even such a poet could picture the heartlessness of making him the laughing-stock of people assembled in their place of worship. Death came to him ere long, however, and it came to that throng of merry-makers, who were even less prepared to die. "So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life." What a mute, inglorious end for one who had been born with golden promise, and endowed with unusual strength. Instead of exalting him, therefore, as a shining example of consecration, let us see in him another illustration of divine grace. Thank God that He can use even such a man as Samson!

The remaining chapters in Judges (17-21) show the depths to which human nature can fall, apart from the grace of God. The book closes, therefore, with sad words which afford the keynote of the book: "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

The Hebrew Philosophy of History

The Book of Judges is a series of object lessons in the religious interpretation of history. The first of these lessons is the folly of excessive individualism. When every man does that which is right in his own

eyes, the average man does wrong. Whenever the Hebrews followed a worthy leader, even from afar, they were comparatively secure, but whenever they began to consult their individual inclinations, they became like scattered sheep. Their individualism caused their institutions to disintegrate. For example, they neglected their roads, and they even had to resort to their enemies when they needed the services of a smith.

More deadly still was their lack of heart religion. They were neglecting the worship of God, both in their homes and at the central sanctuary, and they were failing to do the will of God in their daily lives. Hence they were rapidly deteriorating in moral and spiritual fibre, just as the rose and the domestic fowl, when left to themselves, tend to return to type. So in Russia today, civilization is suffering from a disastrous slump.

But this book shows how the true religion survived—in men like Gideon and Eli, in women like Naomi and Deborah, and in homes like that of Boaz and Ruth, just as it is doubtless surviving in Russia today. Not only did it survive, at a “slow, dying rate,” but it soon began to recuperate. The Hebrews discovered that they could not get along without God, and they cried out to God for deliverance. Sometimes He employed agents whom we should be tempted to scorn, but “God can strike a mighty blow with a crooked stick.”

In the light of later Hebrew history this book strengthens our hopes for the ultimate ascendancy of true religion. Within almost a thousand years after the death of Samson, the descendants of these same Hebrews had become the most religious and moral

people in the world; they had completed the writing of the Old Testament; and they had given to the world the Lord Jesus Christ. What streams of blessings to spring from such muddy sources!

“The wonderful story of the chosen people is itself a greater miracle than any exhibition of divine power it records. It is absolutely unique in the history of humanity. All these things point to the fact that throughout its long, eventful and painful story Israel was upheld by some external power not its own. The fact that the Jews outlasted so many proud empires and ancient races is a miracle, beside which the drying up of the Red Sea that his ancestors might escape from Egypt need scarcely cause more than a passing feeling of surprise” (Foakes-Jackson).

Suggestions for Review and for Discussion

1. What do you mean by the word “Judges”?
2. Show from Judges the necessity of leadership.
3. Note the memorable phrases in the Song of Deborah.
4. Account for Gideon’s success as a leader.
5. How does Jotham’s fable apply to your community?
6. When is it right to break a vow? Illustrate?
7. Was Samson a man of unusual size?
8. Why are strong men often popular heroes?
9. What is your own philosophy of history?
10. Write a character sketch of your favourite Judge.

Note.—See the questions under Genesis (p. 32).

Memorable Chapters: Judges 5, 7, 9, 11, 16.

VIII

RUTH: A RELIGION OF PERSONAL LOYALTY.

THE Book of Ruth, said Goethe, is the most perfect idyll ever penned. And yet it deals with the same period as the Book of Judges! Which of these books, then, is true to the facts? Both of them! In the days of the Judges the state of society was deplorable, but in at least one village conditions were wholesome and home life was beautiful. Altogether apart from its background, however, this book deserves to be known as a short story of love.

While Benjamin Franklin was in Paris he attended a social gathering where the élite of France were entertaining one another with brilliant sallies of wit at the expense of the Bible. At last he craved their indulgence while he read them a short story. They listened in almost breathless silence, and when he had finished they exclaimed that they never had heard such a charming tale, and that they must know the name of the author. Franklin smiled and said that he had been reading the Book of Ruth!

The charm of the story is due in part to its simplicity, and also to the skilful portrayal of the three characters. Naomi is as influential here as Mordecai is in the Book of Esther, and Boaz is as noble a country gentleman as one meets in the Bible. But still Ruth is the heroine. In order to appreciate Ruth,

however, we must give due place to those who loved her most.

Naomi was a good woman of the practical type. In earlier years, owing to a famine, she had gone out with her husband from Bethlehem to Moab, where her husband had died, and her two sons had married. Still later, when her two sons died, she prepared to return to her homeland, and she bade farewell to her daughters-in-law; but one of them, Ruth, clave to Naomi, pledging loyalty to her and to her God in words which deserve literary immortality (1:16-18).

Such a woman as Naomi is often the butt of clumsy jokes, suggested by our modern mother-in-law myth, but like many another in such a delicate position, Naomi lived to promote the well-being of her daughter-in-law. The older woman loved her God and her native land, her old home town and her former neighbours; and she communicated her love to her daughter-in-law. Such loyalty is contagious, and so these two cast in their lots with each other for life, because they both loved and served the same God.

Boaz seems to have been the son of Rahab (Matt. 1:5), but still he was a man above reproach. His attitude towards his reapers was almost ideal (2:4). If all employers displayed such a spirit, and if they met with such a response, labour disputes would be rare. This man was able to get along with people because he was a servant of God (2:12), and so he won the heart of Ruth. He was worthy to become her husband and the father of her children.

But before he could win his heart's desire he had to conform to the Hebrew custom (Lev. 25:25-49) and consult with the nearest of kin to Ruth's former hus-

band. When that kinsman declined to avail himself of his right to her hand, Boaz did not tarry until he had made her his bride. Thus began the making of a happy home, and after a while a baby boy came to gladden their hearts, but somehow the congratulations were bestowed chiefly upon the grandmother!

That child of Ruth and Boaz became the father of Jesse, and he the father of David, a direct ancestor of our Lord. Hence Ruth is one of the four women who are named in the genealogy of our Lord (Matt. 1), and among the four, she is the only one without a blot upon her escutcheon. So the quiet ending of this little book must have helped to prepare the hearts of men to rejoice in the birth of that other little baby boy in little Bethlehem—the holy child Jesus!

Suggestions for Review and for Discussion

1. State the essentials of a short story.
2. Which was the finer character, Ruth or Naomi?
3. What had Ruth, Boaz and Naomi in common?
4. Compare Naomi with the woman in Prov. 31; with Martha.
5. Compare Boaz with Job before his illness (Job 1 and 31).
6. Discuss the importance of genealogy.

Memorable Passage: Ruth 1:16-18.

IX

SAMUEL: THE RISE OF THE KINGDOM

THE history of the Hebrew Kingdom starts with Samuel, one of the most winsome characters in the Old Testament. These two books, which were originally one, bear his name because he was the maker of the two kings, Saul and David. In I Samuel eight chapters present Samuel himself as the chief actor; in the remaining chapters King Saul takes the leading part, whereas through II Samuel King David is the centre of interest.

The keynote here is the Kingdom, and the theme is that Jehovah is the Founder and the Preserver of the nation. The purpose is to show that the unity and the very existence of the nation depend upon its continued loyalty to Jehovah. Hence the record passes lightly over certain events and tendencies, and stresses others strongly, in a fashion which puzzles the student of secular history. The logical way to approach these writings, therefore, is from the standpoint of revealed religion.

The Founder of the Kingdom (I Sam. 1-8)

Samuel was the child of faith and of prayer. Even before his birth he had been dedicated to the service of God, doubtless as a Nazirite. The prayer of his mother Hannah in presenting him at the House of God

is a model of its kind: "For this child I prayed, and Jehovah hath given me the petition which I asked of him; therefore also I have granted him to Jehovah as long as he liveth" (1:27). And then she utters a song of thanksgiving, somewhat like the Magnificat of the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:46-55).

At the time of Samuel's birth the religious leader of God's people was Eli, the priest, an elderly man who was deeply pious. For some reason, however, he was unable to control his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, active priests, who were rapacious and cruel. Eli succeeded better in training little Samuel, who came to live with him and to help him in the labours of the sanctuary. One night the lad thought that he heard the voice of Eli, and responded quickly to the call, which was repeated thrice. At length Samuel learned from Eli that it was the Lord who was calling him, just as many a person since has mistaken the voice of God for the voice of a man. Then Samuel learned from God about the doom which was soon to fall upon Eli and his household, as well as upon the nation, because the man of God had not curbed the vices of his two sons.

This doom fell upon Israel at Aphek, in two successive defeats at the hands of their old-time foes, the Philistines. After the first defeat the elders proposed to bring from Shiloh the Ark, supposing that in magic fashion it might avert disaster. But in the second battle, the Ark itself was captured, Hophni and Phinehas were slain, and the Israelites were put to rout. When Eli learned of this three-fold calamity, he died, grieving most of all for the loss of the Ark, which was the most crushing blow to Israel since the oppression in

Egypt. Throughout this graphic narrative (I Sam. 4) the centre of interest is the Ark.

The Philistines found the Ark no means of blessing, but rather the occasion of discomfiture and terror. So they shifted it from one city to another, and at last they restored it to the Israelites at Bethshemesh, together with suitable tokens of their regret for having taken it away. At this juncture Samuel appears to have begun his active labours as the successor of Eli in the leadership of God's people. First of all Samuel induced the people to repent, confessing their sins and putting away their foreign gods. Then he offered sacrifices to God, who answered in a thunder storm, thus putting the Philistines to flight. The Israelites pursued them and smote them, so that Samuel erected the memorial pillar about which we often sing,

*"Here I'll raise my Ebenezer,
Hither by Thy help I'm come."*

While Israel enjoyed a temporary respite from the attacks of the Philistines, Samuel became a sort of "circuit judge," making his headquarters in Ramah. After he began to be old he appointed his sons to succeed him, but, like the sons of Eli, they proved unfit, for they took bribes and in other ways perverted justice. So the people began to plead with Samuel to let them be "like all the nations" by having a king. Samuel followed his custom and took the matter in prayer to God, who told him to accede to the people's demands. This is an illustration of permission without sanction: "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me."

So Samuel complied with their request, but he warned

them that their king would become a militaristic tyrant, loading them down with burdens greater than they could bear (8:10-18). Still they persisted in demanding a king. From our modern point of view this demand seems to have been justified, but we forget that the comparative failure of the simpler form of government was due to no inherent defect in the plan itself, but rather to the sins of the people. So God "gave them their request and sent leanness into their soul."

At first the distinction between the Judge and the King was slight. Samuel, the last of the Judges, had almost as much authority as Saul, the first of the Kings. But under the Judges the office was conferred by appointment or by election, whereas under the Kings the son was supposed to succeed his father. This hereditary feature later made possible many of the abuses of the monarchical system. Far more than in modern times, the people yonder were affected for weal or for woe by the moral character of their ruler. An understanding of this fact helps to simplify the study of Hebrew history.

It was vital that the first king be a strong leader, and so Samuel anointed Saul, the most promising young man in the kingdom (10:1-8). Then Samuel practically disappeared from public view, but he lived on for years (25:1), so that he was compelled to witness the gradual disintegration of King Saul. At last the prophet was divinely led to anoint David as Saul's successor (I Sam. 16). Before turning to the study of Saul and of David, however, we ought to estimate the character and the influence of the man who made them kings.

Samuel was "one of the most blameless characters in ancient Israel." He reminds us of Moses, with

the same intimate blending of faith and patience, of strength and humility, of integrity and self-sacrifice; and with the same sort of dependence upon God in prayer. In Samuel's farewell address to the people (I Sam. 12) he challenges them to show that he has ever yielded to greed, which is one of the besetting sins of religious leaders. Then he urges the people to be loyal to Jehovah, and he warns them that disloyalty will result in disaster.

The people cry out that they have sinned by demanding a king, and they plead with Samuel to pray for them. Then he comforts them as a father comforts his children: "Fear not!" "Jehovah will not forsake his people for his great name's sake, because it hath pleased Jehovah to make you a people unto himself. Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against you in ceasing to pray for you; but I will instruct you in the good and the right way. Only fear Jehovah and serve him in truth with all your heart; for consider how great things he hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king" (12:22-25).

This strong man of God aided largely in unifying the people. He was the last and the greatest of the Judges, and he made possible the transition to the Kingdom, without any considerable insurrection or violence. By contrast with the turbulence of later Hebrew history, and of Oriental history in general, such an achievement is amazing. Owing largely to Samuel's influence, the true religion became more largely dominant, morals became more commendable, government became more orderly and the people became more prosperous.

Especially during his later years Samuel gathered about him the "school of the prophets" (10:5 and 19:20), among whom he was the leading spirit. It is difficult to trace the exact course of such prophetic activity, but it is clear that beginning with Samuel and continuing for several hundred years the Hebrew Prophets were increasingly active and influential. So it is customary to speak of Samuel as the first of the Prophets.

What a record! Last of the Judges, first of the Prophets, maker of Kings, stabilizer of the Kingdom, saint of the living God! Apart from his failure with his sons, Samuel is practically without reproach, "an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile! "

The First of the Kings (I Sam. 9-31)

It is more difficult to appraise the life and work of Saul. When he was anointed he was the most promising man in the nation, the very sort of leader that the people demanded. He was a man of striking appearance, and in various ways he reminds us of Gideon, being industrious and humble (9:21 and 10:22), and unusually capable in warfare. He belonged to the tribe of Benjamin, which occupied a fairly neutral position between Judah and the tribes to the North, and he became king at a time when the inroads of the Philistines had caused his people largely to forget their petty jealousies.

But still Saul faced a tremendous task. His title was comparatively empty until he made it mean something in the eyes of his world. For example, when he became king his people were dependent upon the Philistines for smiths to sharpen their axes and other tools, as well as their weapons of warfare. As a mili-

tary leader Saul was a success, largely because of the counsels of Samuel, but in various other respects the king showed his incapacity to rule. As he grew older he changed year after year, and always for the worse.

The king's first serious blunder (I Sam. 13) was somewhat like that of Aaron in making the Golden Calf. While at Gilgal awaiting the first severe conflict with the Philistines, Saul grew weary of tarrying for the coming of Samuel; so the king himself offered sacrifices to Jehovah, and when the prophet came to reproach him for his rashness, instead of confessing his fault, Saul defended himself. Then Samuel told him that he had forfeited his right to the throne, which was to have descended to his son.

Saul's second great blunder was after the battle of Michmash, in which the Hebrews were victorious, largely because of the faith and valour of Jonathan, Saul's son, who shared his father's virtues but not his vices. Jonathan's words to his armour-bearer deserve to be better known today, when we almost worship numbers: "There is no restraint to Jehovah to save by many or by few" (14:6). This victory at Michmash was one of the decisive battles in Hebrew history, for it set God's people largely free from the domination of the Philistines, and it emboldened Saul and Jonathan to extricate their people from dependence on other surrounding nations (14:47).

In the flush of this triumph at Michmash Saul strove to slay Jonathan, the hero of the hour. As the hosts had gone out to the fray, Saul had rashly vowed that he would put to death any one of his warriors who partook of food on that day of battle, and later when he learned that Jonathan, ignorant of his father's vow,

had eaten honey in the forest, the king was angry and he would have slain the crown prince if the people had not intervened. The difference here between King Saul and Jephthah is that Saul was not permitted to carry out his rash vow, but the guilt of each was much the same.

Saul's third serious blunder was in disobeying Samuel's direct command not to spare the Amalekites and their booty taken in battle. Saul's offence here was like that of Achan (Josh. 7), and was doubly repulsive because the king denied his guilt. When the prophet asked him, "What meaneth this bleating of the sheep in mine ears?" the king protested that he had obeyed the prophet's commands, but that the people had insisted on keeping these animals to offer as sacrifices to Jehovah. Here is the old sin of blaming somebody else! The prophet's reply is justly famous: "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. . . . Because thou hast rejected the word of Jehovah, he hath also rejected thee from being king" (15:22, 23).

These blunders reached their height in Saul's jealousy and hatred of David, beginning immediately after the young shepherd's victory over Goliath, and flaming forth again and again, as long as Saul lived. The beginnings of this jealousy and hatred are of rare psychological interest, showing the inner development of an obsession, or "complex" (I Sam. 18). Note here the successive stages of Saul's determination to put David out of the way.

The remaining years of Saul's life were devoted largely to the pursuit of David, and at times the king vented his rage upon Jonathan, because of his friendship for David. At one time Saul attempted to slay

his son with a spear, and at another he actually caused the slaughter of Ahimelech and eighty-four other priests, who had been kind to David, and who died protesting that David was the loyal servant of King Saul. The most charitable explanation of such aberrations is that Saul was the victim of intermittent insanity. This may explain that difficult saying, "An evil spirit from Jehovah was upon Saul" (16:14; 18:10; 19:9).

The mad king's last, sad blunder was in consulting with "the witch of Endor" (I Sam. 28). Like many fearful folk today, who frequent spiritualistic séances, Saul felt that he had forfeited the favour of the Lord, and still he wished the guidance of superhuman powers. So he disobeyed the law of his religion and consulted a necromancer. Opinions differ about whether he actually saw the spirit of Samuel, or whether the woman imposed on his credulity. The present writer believes that Saul was grossly deceived by that shrewd woman who knew enough of current events to delude the half-crazed king. At any rate she told him frankly that on the morrow his people were to be defeated by the Philistines, and that he and his sons were to be slain—all of which occurred the next day at the battle of Gilboa (I Sam. 31).

What sort of a man was Saul? The best words ever spoken about him were by the man whom he had most wronged. David's eulogy of Saul and Jonathan (II Sam. 1) reveals David's magnanimity, but it likewise suggests that when Saul was himself he was a lovable man. The later books of the Bible contain no word of censure for poor Saul. Let us therefore think of his strength and his military prowess, of his loyalty to his

people and of his ability to hold them together during those early years of the Kingdom.

Such a career, nevertheless, affords a warning to every young man of promise. Saul was not spiritually minded: he did not understand the will of God, or appreciate the spiritual importance of the Kingdom; hence he did not share the ideals of Samuel. As a practical leader Saul proved to be rash and impetuous, disobedient to God and resentful of the counsels of His prophet. Saul was a successful warrior, and in a sense he was nothing but a warrior. He lacked self-control, as well as certain of the finer graces which rarely flourish on the battlefield. What a contrast to that other Saul, who likewise belonged to the tribe of Benjamin! King Saul started aright and ended ignobly; Saul of Tarsus started wrongly and ended gloriously.

The Shepherd King (I Sam. 16–II Sam. 24)

The sacred record deals with Samuel and Saul largely because of their connection with David, who is the most prominent figure in the Old Testament, and the most colourful. David's life is of interest for its own sake, and likewise because he helped to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. For convenience in study we shall separate his life into three periods, the first of which is the period of preparation, covering thirty years (I Sam. 16–II Sam. 1).

David was the youngest son of Jesse, a prominent sheep man who resided at Bethlehem in Judah. When Jehovah rejected Saul as king He commanded the prophet to go quietly to Bethlehem and to anoint as king one of the sons of Jesse. Samuel was pleased with each of the older sons, but he found that "Jehovah

seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but Jehovah looketh on the heart " (16:7). When seven of Jesse's sons had failed to receive divine approval, the prophet learned about David, who was out with his sheep. This lad proved to be the one chosen of God, and so he was privately anointed. "The Spirit of Jehovah came mightily upon David from that day forward," but, like Joseph, he was to wait for years before he entered into his kingdom, and meanwhile he was to suffer many a hardship.

The young shepherd's victory over Goliath (I Sam. 17), the champion of the Philistines, is significant because it shows David's trust in God, as well as his courage, his resourcefulness and his independence. Because he trusted in God he dared to be himself, thus showing the young man today not to sing about daring to be a Daniel, but rather to avoid the sin of trying to be somebody else. This exploit won for David the hearts of the people, who acclaimed him as their hero. But their folly in contrasting David with Saul, to the disadvantage of the latter, started an endless chain of wrongs against the shepherd hero.

In all of these difficulties with the king, so far as we know, David was blameless. He loved Saul to the very last, and was loyal to him even after the king's jealous rage had caused David to become an outlaw somewhat like Robin Hood. During these years of peril David twice spared the king's life (I Sam. 24 and 26), when by yielding to the entreaties of his comrades David might quickly have settled his score, and thus have received the crown. Each time with difficulty he restrained his men of war from doing violence, and his appeal shows the depth of his religious nature: "Je-

hovah forbid that I should put forth my hand against Jehovah's anointed " (26:11).

During these trying years David was cheered by his friendship with Jonathan, the crown prince, who might naturally have shared his father's jealousy of the slayer of Goliath. This friendship is famous as an object lesson of disinterested love between man and man (I Sam. 20 and 23). David seems to have received more than he gave, but only because Jonathan fell in battle before David could prove his real love. David's eulogy over King Saul and Prince Jonathan is one of the noblest elegiac poems in any language, and his repeated kindnesses to Jonathan's offspring proved his loyalty to the memory of his friend.

Meanwhile David was fleeing from Saul, and was providentially spared again and again. For example, he was prevented from committing two serious blunders, the second of which would have been irretrievable. When his young men asked a wealthy landowner named Nabal to provide supplies for the troops, Nabal insolently refused (I Sam. 25), and nothing save the quick action of Abigail, his wife, in supplying these stores and in pleading for her husband's life prevented David from executing swift vengeance. In her plea for mercy she employed those beautiful words, "Though man be risen up to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul, yet the soul of my lord shall be bound up in the bundle of life with Jehovah thy God " (25:29). David thanked her for dissuading him from avenging indignities with blood, and later when he learned that her churlish husband had fallen dead, David married the comely widow, thus gaining possession of a large and fertile farm from which to feed his men of war.

Some time afterwards, when his situation was still more desperate, David and his men took refuge among the Philistines (I Sam. 27), and when the Philistines started out upon their campaign against Saul and the Israelites, David actually attempted to go with them and fight against his own fatherland (I Sam. 29). But the Philistines were afraid to let him accompany them; thus they prevented him from befouling his hands with the blood of his countrymen. This is the worst mistake that David ever made, except his sin with Bathsheba.

The Period of Achievement (II Sam. 2-10)

David ascended the throne of Judah at the age of thirty, and his record during the next twenty years is one of achievement unparalleled in Hebrew history. For the first seven of these years he ruled over Judah alone, for at the death of Saul the tribes in the North withdrew from their alliance with Judah and selected as their king Ish-Bosheth, the son of Saul. These tribes taken collectively were known as Israel, for the cleavage in the times of David was along practically the same lines, both geographical and tribal, as at the final Disruption (I Kings 12).

In Judah David kept growing stronger in his hold upon his own people and in his influence over those without, whereas in Israel Ish-Bosheth showed increasingly his incapacity to rule. In the wars between them the forces of David were victorious, and when Ish-Bosheth's general, Abner, went over to David, the King of Israel must have given up hope. A little later Ish-Bosheth was murdered, and his assassins, looking to David for a reward, met with summary punishment,

because David abhorred such crimes of treachery and violence. Meanwhile Abner had been slain by Joab, David's general, because of a blood feud between their two families, but David disclaimed responsibility for this deed, and conciliated the friends of Abner by saying, truthfully, "There is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel" (3:38).

The tribes to the North were so impressed by David's statesmanship and by his conciliatory policy that they came voluntarily and asked him to become the ruler of the United Kingdom. In order to bind together the nation which was one only in name, King David selected a new capital, Jerusalem, which was free from past associations with either Judah or Israel. But first he and his men had to capture this stronghold of Zion (II Sam. 5); then he began his building program. In such constructive leadership David shines by contrast with Saul, who had been content to drift along with no seat of government except his own farm house. David's selection of Jerusalem as a fortified capital round which the life of his people might centre was one of the master strokes of that far-seeing statesman.

David's second move towards unifying his people was still more significant. He understood that in cementing the loose joints of a new nation nothing is so effective as religion, and he took steps to have the Ark brought up from the house of Obed-Edom, where it had been reposing, and where it had been the means of rich blessing. David showed his sentiment by his jubilant expressions of delight when at last the Ark was brought into Jerusalem (II Sam. 6). Here, again, David shines by contrast with Saul, who let his people struggle along without the unifying influence of the Ark.

David's third plan for the betterment of his nation was not destined to be carried out in his day, but still it shows his genius as a constructive statesman. He told Nathan, the prophet, that it was not fitting for the king to dwell in a mansion of cedar while the Ark of God rested beneath curtains, and that he greatly desired to build a suitable Temple. At first Nathan approved the project, but later he learned from God that while David was to be richly blessed, still he was not to be permitted to erect the Temple. The Book of Chronicles (I Chron. 22:7, 8) shows that this privilege was denied to David because he had been a man of blood. During the remainder of his life, however, he had the satisfaction of collecting materials for the building of the Temple by his son Solomon.

This chapter (II Sam. 7) is one of the most significant in the Old Testament, for it shows that the dynasty of King David was to endure, and that his descendants were to become the direct heirs of the promises of the Covenant. These promises were at last fulfilled in the coming of the Lord Jesus, Who according to the flesh belonged to the House of David. In response to these glorious promises through the prophet Nathan, King David uttered a beautiful prayer of adoration and thanksgiving, in which he humbly accepted the promised mercies of God and implored divine grace for his people in days to come.

Meanwhile the king had been extending his borders (II Sam. 8-10), in fulfilment of the ancient promise (Gen. 15:18), so that his dominion became the mightiest between Mesopotamia and Egypt. In his various battles with the Philistines David subdued them so completely that they never again became formidable

foes of God's people. He was likewise successful in his warfare with Moab, with Ammon and with Edom, as well as with other neighbouring peoples, who thus became his vassals. There is no proof, however, that David started any one of these wars. "Only to ward off unwarranted attacks, and for the defense of the most vital interests, did David draw the sword, but when he did, it was in a war of God" (Cornill).

Doubtless we tend to exaggerate the size and the relative importance of Israel among the nations, for it was not the will of God that the chosen nation should ever become a world power; her destiny was more spiritual. "At no time did her territory, including tributary lands, extend to more than one-twentieth of the widest limits of the Assyrian or Chaldean Empire" (McCurdy). But still there was a vast difference between the narrow limits over which David began to reign and the broader confines over which he held sway at the time of his death. If we could judge David, therefore, by what we have learned about him thus far, we should count him an amazing success. The secret of his unparalleled achievements lay in his loyalty to God and in his love for the people, over whom he watched as tenderly as a good shepherd watches over his sheep. For this reason David is sometimes called the Shepherd King (II Sam. 5:2 and 7:7).

The Period of Disaster (II Sam. 11-24)

After David's sin with Bathsheba, however, he entered upon a period of cumulative disasters. The sordid details of his double crime—adultery and murder—are well known. For a year following this sin, or series of sins, he seems to have remained obdurate, but when

he listened to Nathan's parable about the poor man's lamb (II Sam. 12), the Shepherd King's heart was moved, and when he heard the prophet boldly saying, with his finger pointing at the king's face, "Thou art the man!"—David broke down and confessed his sin. At this time he is supposed to have written the Fifty-first Psalm, as an expression of his sorrow for sin; and a little later, the Thirty-second, as an evidence of his satisfaction in being forgiven.

During the remaining twenty years of David's life he and his kingdom suffered from the after-effects of his forgiven sin. First of all, the child of David and Bathsheba died, and the way in which he received this stroke proved that he had regained his former trust in God (II Sam. 12:22, 23). Then his grown sons began to sin as their father had sinned—by disloyalty, by incest and by murder. His son Amnon foully wronged his own half-sister Tamar, and then drove her from his room, weeping as she went. Two years later Tamar's full brother, Absalom, avenged her wrong by murdering Amnon. Absalom was obliged to flee from the Court, and he took refuge among his mother's people, where he started those machinations which later resulted in his rebellion.

Absalom was noted for his beauty of person, and he was adept in the wiles of the unscrupulous politician (15:1-6). Gradually he gathered about him the disaffected in the realm, including the majority of David's leading men. Joab, Abishai and Hushai still remained loyal to their king, and so did the majority of the priests and the Levites. But the masses of the people appear to have been seduced by Absalom's charms, perhaps because their admiration for David had waned

after his sin with Bathsheba. So the king was forced to flee from the royal city, accompanied by a comparatively small body of warriors.

The shrewdest of the men who went over to the prince was Ahithophel, who advised Absalom to attack David at once, before he could rally his forces. If the prince had done so, he might have annihilated his father's little band, but Absalom preferred to follow the absurd suggestion of Hushai, who counseled caution and delay. Hushai was David's friend, whom the king had left behind in Jerusalem to mislead the young usurper. When Ahithophel saw that the attack was to be postponed, he knew that the cause was hopeless, and so he killed himself. Without the shrewd counsels of Ahithophel, Absalom and his untrained troops were no match for David and his seasoned campaigners, who won a decisive victory at Mahanaim.

In the midst of the battle Absalom was riding upon a mule, and the long hairs of his head were caught in the branch of a tree, so that he was left suspended in the air, and then he was slain, despite the orders of David that his son must be dealt with gently. When David learned of his son's death he uttered those lamentable words: "O my son, Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (II Sam. 18:33). But Joab, that gruff old general, took his king severely to task: "If Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well!" And so, before it was too late, Joab persuaded David to placate his angry followers.

Meanwhile the king had been troubled by various evidences of disaffection among the descendants and the fellow-tribesmen of Saul. Even Mephibosheth,

Jonathan's lame son, whom David had befriended (II Sam. 9:1-13), incurred suspicion of taking advantage of the uprising under Absalom (16:1-4). Shimei, a member of the tribe of Benjamin, publicly cursed David because of the blood of the house of Saul. After Absalom's rebellion had been quelled, another Benjaminite, Sheba, rose up against David and tried to lead the ten tribes in revolt, but he was slain by his supposed friends, and his insurrection ceased.

Last of all, when David seemed to be at the point of death, his son Adonijah, aided by the warrior Joab and the high priest Abiathar, attempted to seize the throne (I Kings 1). This was a shrewd attempt to forestall the crowning of Solomon, and it was a direct act of disloyalty to David and to God, for Adonijah and his abettors must have known that Solomon had been designated of God to succeed his father on the throne. Here for the first time the chief priest and the leading warrior joined in a conspiracy to defeat the plans of David, but despite such powerful opposition Solomon was crowned as king before David died.

Much of the record of these last years of David's reign is not easy to follow, for there was an increasing complexity of domestic and inter-tribal jealousies, in which many a supposed friend proved false. It is clear, however, that David and his people suffered tremendously from the after-effects of his sin. "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap;" and alas, others must reap with him.

An Estimate of David

In view of these black facts it is difficult for modern folk to recognize the solid worth of David and his

lasting contributions to the Kingdom of God. The modern tendency is to think too exclusively of his failings and too little of his virtues, forgetting that even the best men "have this treasure in earthen vessels." The truth is that David was "the most luminous figure and the most gifted personage in the history of Israel" (Cornill).

There is more about David in the Old Testament than about any other man. I Samuel is largely the record of his achievements, and II Samuel is dominated by his personality. Many of the other portions of the Old Testament, and notably the Psalms, have been said to be David's "lengthened shadow," and the New Testament contains more about him than about any other Old Testament saint. To the inspired authors of the Bible he was the ideal king, and a type of the Messiah.

David was "a man after God's own heart" (I Sam. 13:14). These words were spoken about him long before his awful sin, but they were true of him in general, for they were employed about him by the Apostle Paul (Acts 13:22). David sinned greatly, as the inspired writers are careful to explain, but he repented, and he found forgiveness. On the whole he was a man of faith, with a real understanding of the mission and the destiny of his people.

Personally, David was one of the most lovable characters in olden days. He was strong and brave, as well as kind and magnanimous. He was not ashamed to be known as a man of sentiment (II Sam. 23:13-17), and he abhorred such deeds of violence as were common in his day. Apart from his closing years, when he seems to have been entering into dotage, he won and held the

esteem and love of the common people, as well as the religious leaders and the most worthy statesmen in the realm.

In his life work David proved to be one of the most versatile men of history. He was notably successful as a shepherd, as a warrior, as an executive, as a builder, as a far-sighted statesman, as a musician, as a poet, and as a loyal friend. In the eyes of the Hebrew people, therefore, he stood forth as the ideal king, and in the Scriptures he is repeatedly said to have prepared the way for the coming of our Lord. (Cf. Davidson, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 371.)

Suggestions for Review and for Discussion

1. Why was Samuel reluctant to anoint a king?
2. How many of these men failed in rearing their sons?
3. Contrast Saul and Jonathan.
4. Who were the Philistines?
5. Point out the religious element in I Samuel 17.
6. What do you know about Nathan?
7. Name the members of David's informal Cabinet.
8. Why did Absalom's rebellion almost succeed?
9. What was the best thing about David?
10. Explain "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Matt. 21:9).

Note.—See the questions under Genesis (p. 32).

Memorable Chapters: I Samuel 3, 12, 16, 17; II Samuel 1, 7, 12, 18.

X

KINGS: THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE KINGDOM

THESE two books were originally one. They trace the history of the Hebrews from the accession of Solomon to the Captivity of Judah, placing the emphasis first upon the Disruption, and then upon the Northern Kingdom. The purpose appears to be to give the Southern Kingdom an object lesson of the folly of forgetting God. Thus the two books fall into three parts: the first shows the United Kingdom under Solomon; the second, the Divided Kingdom until the fall of Samaria; the third, the Southern Kingdom until the destruction of Jerusalem.

Solomon (I Kings 1-11) appears to have been about eighteen or twenty when he became king. He found it necessary to put out of the way certain prominent men who had previously shown their disloyalty (ch. 2), but afterwards he was known as a man of peace. Early in his reign he went to Gibeon, where God appeared to him in a dream and asked him what he most wished. Solomon replied that since he was but a little child, he wished wisdom. This reply so pleased the Lord that He gave the young king wisdom and other blessings which he had not asked, provided he walked in the ways of his father (3:4-15).

The young king quickly showed his practical wisdom,

in matters both small and great. When two unmarried mothers came before him to claim the same babe he settled the dispute to the satisfaction of all concerned. In order to provide for the needs of his vast royal household he divided the kingdom into twelve districts, distinct from the former tribal limits, so that each district might furnish supplies for a certain month each year. He made an alliance with Egypt by marriage with the king's daughter, and likewise promoted commerce with other nations. Solomon, therefore, was the sort of king that the people had wanted: he was like the rulers of the other nations. But for this very reason he was an increasing disappointment to God, Who wished the Hebrews to remain a separate people.

The fame of Solomon is due partly to his achievements as a builder. He built fortifications at strategic points in the kingdom, but he concentrated his operations chiefly in Jerusalem, where he erected the Temple, and also a house for himself. In building the Temple he used the materials collected by his father, and he added to them largely, making a contract with Hiram, King of Tyre, to provide cedar and fir, as well as skilled workmen to prepare the timber and the stone (I Kings 5).

Solomon's address and his prayer at the dedication of the Temple (I Kings 8) are worthy of study as models of style. His prayer consists of moving pleas for the pardon of the people in coming days when they confess their sins. In reply Jehovah promises that He will bless the people forever, provided they walk in His ways; but He warns them that He will cut them off if they cease to follow Him. This prayer and this response remind us of Deuteronomy, with

its constant reminders that worship is no substitute for righteousness.

Meanwhile the king was becoming famous for his wisdom. Among those who journeyed from afar to put his wisdom to the test was the beautiful Queen of Sheba. When she saw and heard the many proofs of his wisdom she exclaimed, "The half was not told me; thy wisdom and prosperity exceed thy fame. Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, that stand continually before thee and that hear thy wisdom" (10:7). But somehow those servants did not share her feelings of thanksgiving and awe!

For many reasons Solomon was gradually losing his hold upon the hearts of his people. His extensive building operations and his magnificent scale of living offended their love of simplicity and proved more costly than his kingdom could afford. He burdened other portions of the realm in order to enrich Judah and Jerusalem, to which he belonged by birth. Thus he fulfilled the prediction of Samuel that the king would become an Oriental despot and would oppress the people (I Sam. 8:10-18). At last he left behind him "an impoverished treasury, a discontented people and a tottering government." "After me, the Deluge!"

Solomon was a failure, also, as a moral and spiritual leader. In his domestic life he patterned after the worst traits of his father and his mother (Bathsheba); he carried polygamy to the most disgusting extremes, and he became known for his luxurious self-indulgences. His marriage with Pharaoh's daughter tended to promote polytheism and idolatry, and so did his commercial arrangements with Hiram, who was a devotee of Baal. Solomon himself, in his old age, publicly

encouraged the idolatrous worship of imported deities. He was a weaker and a worse man when he ceased to reign at sixty than when he began at twenty. What an indictment! The cause of his gradual moral disintegration was his selfishness. He was a lover of money, of ease and of show, because he was not a lover of God.

The record concerning Solomon closes, therefore, with the account of increasing troubles (I Kings 11). He had rejected Jehovah, and so Jehovah rejected him. Consequently he lost certain dependencies, such as Edom and Syria, which his father had attached to the kingdom. At home Solomon alienated Jeroboam, an influential leader in Ephraim, the most powerful tribe in the North. Through the prophet Ahijah Jeroboam had learned that he was to become king of the Northern Tribes, but still he was forced to flee to Egypt to escape the wrath of Solomon. At the king's death, however, Jeroboam returned to lead the Ten Tribes in a successful revolt against Rehoboam. Thus closed the history of the United Kingdom.

The Disruption: The Beginning of the End
(c. 933 B. C.)

The Disruption was one of the worst calamities which ever befell God's chosen people. It was the culmination of tendencies which had long been at work. In the Book of Judges, for example, and still more clearly in the times of David (II Sam. 2), there was a cleavage between the tribes in the North and Judah in the South. This cleavage was due partly to geography, for Judah formed a separate unit; but it was due much more to inter-tribal jealousies. In David's time these divergent

elements were brought together by his magnetic personality and by his strong leadership, and later they were held together temporarily by Solomon's diplomacy and by his dazzling splendour. Yet the United Kingdom endured for only two generations, and when the cleavage came it was along practically the same lines as of yore.

The immediate occasion of the Disruption was Rehoboam's folly (I Kings 12). Instead of granting the demands of the Northern Tribes, as voiced by Jeroboam, the king asked for three days to consider the matter. Then he consulted with the older men, who knew how close the Northern Tribes were to revolution, and these elders offered him advice which every young man should take to heart: "If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants forever" (12:7). But such a conciliatory attitude seemed to him too tame, and so he consulted with the younger men, who told him to defy the people. The young fool followed this mad course, and told the people of Israel, most insolently, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions" (12:10, 14).

The immediate result was the formation of another little nation, which resumed its ancestral name, Israel. A casual observer would have said that the Northern Kingdom had all of the advantages; for it had twice as much land as the Southern, and four times as much that was tillable; it had three times as many inhabitants, and it was situated more advantageously

for trade with other peoples. (See the chart on the following page.) But still the real advantages were with Judah, which was less exposed to capture, being relatively inaccessible, especially for chariots. Judah retained the former government, with the former capital and the former line of kings; and the former religion, with the Temple, the regular priests and the direct promises of the Covenant. Hence the Southern Kingdom survived, and gave the Messiah to the world.

From this time on it is difficult to trace the history of the Hebrews, for the two streams run in different directions, and there are comparatively few outstanding personalities. Thus far it has been possible to trace the history of the Kingdom by keeping in view Samuel and Saul, David and Solomon, but to know the facts about the period following the Disruption one must watch a larger number of smaller men. In dealing with these complicated facts, however, the Book of Kings follows a definite plan, fixing attention chiefly upon Israel until it disappears in 722 B. C., and then concentrating upon Judah. In dealing with any one ruler the Kings employs a set formula somewhat like that in the Judges, telling the same facts about every king, and in almost the same words.

In the following pages, therefore, the Northern Kingdom will be given the prior consideration, and for convenience the records of the two kingdoms will be divided into three periods. During the first of these periods the prevailing attitude between Israel and Judah was suspicion and hostility; during the second, friendliness and co-operation; and during the third, renewed suspicion and hostility. At first the external

	NORTHERN KINGDOM (c. 933-722 B. C.=c. 210 yrs.)	SOUTHERN KINGDOM (c. 933-586 B. C.=c. 350 years)
NATURAL RESOURCES	Larger territory More fertile soil Better situated for trade	More isolated More largely a unit
PEOPLE	Larger population Ten different tribes	More hardy stock More homogeneous
GOVERNMENT	New capital (Samaria) Nine dynasties	Former capital (Jerusalem) One dynasty (House David)
RULERS	Average reign brief None counted good Four counted strong	Average reign longer Eight counted good
RELIGION	New centres (Dan & Bethel) New priests Approved use of images Increasing Baalism	Temple of Solomon Regular priests Less idolatry Less polytheism Covenant promise
LEADING PROPHETS	Elijah—Elisha—Jonah Amos—Hosea	Isaiah—Micah—Nahum—Jere- miah—Zephaniah—Habakkuk
CAPTIVITY	Fall Samaria (722) (Shalmaneser IV. and Sargon II.) Deported to Nineveh	Destruction Jerusalem (586) (Nebuchadrezzar II.) Deported to Babylon
LATER HISTORY	"Lost" (i. e., absorbed)	Seventy years "bondage" Restoration Messiah

menace was from Syria, but later Assyria became far more formidable, and all the while Egypt was a disturbing factor.

From Jeroboam I. to Omri (1 Kings 12:1–16:28)

Jeroboam I. began his reign in Israel by setting apart two centres of worship—Bethel in the South and Dan in the North—so that his people might no longer worship in Jerusalem. He intended to promote the worship of Jehovah, but his two sanctuaries were already identified with the worship of heathen gods. Then he set up images, somewhat like Aaron had made at Sinai, and he appointed new priests. He was virtually instituting a new religion, and he was starting an endless chain of evils. In the later history of Israel many a king is said to have walked in the ways of Jeroboam; for as king he openly countenanced the idolatrous worship of Jehovah, as well as the immoralities which seem inseparable from idolatry.

Jeroboam I. reigned over Israel twenty-two years, and at his death his son Nadab reigned two years, when he was murdered by Baasha. Baasha reigned twenty-four years, when he was succeeded by his son Elah. Elah reigned almost two years, when he was murdered by Zimri. Zimri reigned but seven days. Such were the kaleidoscopic changes on the throne of Israel! During her entire history the average reign of a king was but eleven years, and the average duration of a dynasty was but twenty-three years. Hence the succession of the kings of Israel is almost as difficult to trace as that of the rulers of France.

Turning now to the history of Judah—the reign of Rehoboam practically coincided with that of Jeroboam.

The new king of Judah was almost as foolish in his conduct of the realm as he had been in his negotiations with the Northern Tribes. He encouraged idolatry, and he even countenanced sodomites (*i. e.*, "temple priestesses"), doubtless because his mother was a Moabitess. During his reign Shishak, King of Egypt, came to Jerusalem, and apparently without opposition, took away from the Temple and the king's palace the shields of gold which Solomon had made, for which Rehoboam substituted shields of brass. Meanwhile there was inconclusive warfare between Rehoboam and Jeroboam I.

Rehoboam's son, Abijah (Abijam) reigned but three years, and was a sorry failure. But Abijah's son, Asa, ruled forty-one years, and was one of the best kings of Judah. Asa began to reform the nation, putting away the sodomites, and the idols which his father had made. He even removed his mother from being queen, because she encouraged idolatry. Such facts suggest an interesting study in heredity, which worked yonder in four different ways: a bad king, Abijah, had a good son, Asa; a good king, Asa, had a good son, Jehoshaphat; a good king, Jehoshaphat, had a bad son, Jehoram; and a bad king, Jehoram, had a bad son, Ahaziah. Mendel himself could scarcely have explained such facts!

In Asa's time there was war between him and Baasha, King of Israel. Baasha had fortified Ramah, six miles north of Jerusalem, on the border between the two kingdoms. But Asa made a mercenary alliance with Benhadad I., King of Syria, who had been friendly to Israel; so Asa and Benhadad prevailed over Baasha. Then the King of Judah tore down the fortress at Ramah and employed the materials in building up other

cities in Judah. He was a practical psychologist! During this first period the relations between the two kingdoms were hostile, with the advantage in warfare inclining towards Judah. During the next period, beginning with Omri, the relations between them became more friendly and intimate.

✧ *From Omri to Jehu (I Kings 16:29–II Kings 8)*

Omri fills but a small place in the Book of Kings, though he was one of the strongest rulers of Israel, and the founder of her greatest dynasty. He gained his throne by putting down Zimri, a usurper, and by overcoming Tibni, a rival claimant. Omri's most signal achievement was in fixing the capital in Samaria, from which that district later took its name. His prowess is recorded in the Moabite Stone, which was discovered in 1868, and is one of the most important archæological discoveries in connection with Hebrew history.

Omri is best known to Bible students as the father of Ahab. In pursuance of his policy of winning the friendship of surrounding nations, Omri made commercial treaties with Tyre and Sidon, and later his son Ahab became the husband of Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, King of Sidon. Jezebel was the most notorious woman in Hebrew history, for she almost succeeded in transferring the allegiance of the Israelites from Jehovah to Baal; but from her own point of view she was true to the faith of her fathers. Like Lady Macbeth, Jezebel was a stronger character than her husband, but still he bears the blame for the apostasy of his people, for he was nominally a follower of Jehovah. Throughout the later history of Israel the worst of her kings are said to have walked in the ways of Ahab, who was even

worse than Jeroboam I. Jeroboam had encouraged the idolatrous worship of Jehovah; but Ahab encouraged the worship of Baal. The one was guilty of religious compromise; the other, of religious treason.

The dominant figure in this period, however, was the prophet Elijah. The account of his victory over the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel (I Kings 18) is one of the most dramatic narratives in all literature. This chapter shows how the people of Israel were prevented from transferring their allegiance openly to Baal. "How long go ye limping between the two sides? If Jehovah be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him!" The peril of the situation appears in the succeeding sentence: "The people answered him not a word." But ere that day had ended those same people were crying out, "Jehovah he is God! Jehovah he is God!" What a victory for righteousness!

For an estimate of this mighty man of God turn to the books about the Prophets, such as the present writer's *Prophets: Elijah to Christ*. As the champion of the rights of the people, Elijah rebuked Ahab for his sins against Naboth, whose death Ahab had occasioned in order that he might seize Naboth's vineyard (I Kings 21). In such sins Ahab, like Macbeth, was influenced by his wife. When he acted on his own initiative, as in warfare, he shone in a more favourable light. Ahab was by no means a good man, but still he was one of the four strong kings of Israel.

When Benhadad I., King of Syria, came up against Samaria, Ahab was at first inclined to yield without resistance, but he was so stung by the insolent demands of the Syrian king that he sent back a bold reply: "Let not him that girdeth on his armour boast himself

as he that putteth it off" (20:11). Ahab took the initiative, in obedience to the command of a prophet of Jehovah, and overcame the arrogant King of Syria, somewhat as Washington overcame superior forces at Trenton. In each case the defeated general was taken by surprise while drinking with his officers.

The next year the King of Syria renewed the attack on Israel in a different fashion. He supposed, with some reason (Judges 1:19), that the Hebrews were invincible in the hills, but not on the plain, where the foe could employ chariots. But he quickly found that Jehovah is the God of the valleys as well as of the hills. Proud Benhadad, defeated once again, cast himself on the mercy of Ahab, who spared his life and sent him home. Thus Ahab incurred the condemnation of the prophet, who showed him in a symbolic way that he had forfeited the favour of Jehovah. Here occur those familiar words describing a man too busy to do his duty: "As thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone" (20:40).

For three years there was peace with Syria. Then Ahab entered into an offensive alliance with Jehoshaphat, King of Judah. Ever since the beginning of Omri's reign the relations between Israel and Judah had been growing more friendly, so that the two royal households began to intermarry, and to bestow the same names upon their sons (*e. g.*, Jehoram, Ahaziah and Jehoash). Before going out to battle against Syria Ahab and Jehoshaphat consulted with the prophet Micaiah, whom Ahab dreaded because he always foretold evil; but despite Micaiah's warnings of disaster they went into the battle. Ahab knew that he would be the special target of the Syrian archers, and he dis-

guised himself, but he fell before a certain man who "drew his bow at a venture." This chapter (I Kings 22) is one of the finest historical narratives in the Old Testament.

Jehoshaphat—whose reign in Jerusalem practically coincided with that of Ahab in Samaria—was one of the best kings of Judah, as we learn especially from the Chronicles (II Chron. 17-20). He was a man of personal piety, and he promoted religious education. He reorganized the government, and under his wise leadership the people prospered. He carried out the work of reform which his father Asa had commenced. But Jehoshaphat committed two serious blunders, as we have seen: he took Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, as the wife of his son Jehoram; and he joined with Ahab in warring against Syria. Still Jehoshaphat was one of the best kings of Judah, whereas his son Jehoram was one of the worst.

During the closing years of this period the thrones of the two kingdoms were occupied simultaneously by two close relatives named Jehoram, both of whom were bad men. Jehoram in Judah succeeded his father Jehoshaphat directly, but Jehoram in Israel began to reign two years after his father Ahab's death. During these two years Ahab's son Ahaziah was king in Israel. He is notorious because he sent to ask Beelzebub, the god of the Philistines in Ekron, if he (Ahaziah) would recover from his serious accident. Through the prophet Elijah the king learned that he was soon to die. At his death the throne of Israel passed to his brother Jehoram (II Kings 1).

The simplest way, however, to trace these events is to follow the Biblical narrative about Elijah and Elisha.

When Elijah was translated his mantle of service and a double portion of his spirit of loyalty to Jehovah came upon his successor, Elisha (II Kings 2). Elisha rendered many a helpful service to suffering humanity. For example, when Naaman, the captain of the hosts of Syria, became afflicted with leprosy, he learned through a captive maid that there was a prophet in Israel who could heal him; so Naaman came to Jehoram, King of Israel, with a letter from Benhadad I., King of Syria, asking that he cure the Syrian warrior. Jehoram rent his clothes, for he knew that he could do nothing, and he feared to offend the King of Syria. But Elisha intervened and wrought the desired cure (II Kings 5).

Afterwards Benhadad I. came out to war against Israel, but his shrewd maneuvers were frustrated by the superhuman knowledge of Elisha (II Kings 6). At last, while Benhadad was besieging Samaria there was such a severe famine in the city that distracted mothers devoured their babes, but one day Elisha predicted that on the morrow food in Samaria would be abundant and cheap. That night the Syrian hosts fled in terror, leaving vast supplies in their deserted tents. "The Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host" (7:6). In the early morning four famished lepers found the empty tents of the Syrians and notified the starving citizens of Samaria that the word of the prophet had been fulfilled.

These stirring events seem to have taken place during the time of Jehoram, whose reign in Israel completed the dynasty of Omri. So did the reign of the other Jehoram, in Judah, practically complete the

period there, for Jehoram's son, Ahaziah, ruled in Jerusalem only one year. Both of these kings, named Jehoram were wicked men, and under their ineffectual leadership the two kingdoms lost much of the prosperity to which they had attained under Ahab and Jehoshaphat. In Judah, for example, Jehoram permitted the kingdom to dwindle through the loss of various dependencies (II Kings 8:20-24). Soon after his death his son Ahaziah went out to war as an ally of his uncle, Jehoram, King of Israel, and both of them were slain by Jehu, the founder of the fifth dynasty in Israel. Thus ended ingloriously the second period in the relations between the two kingdoms. The policy of intermarriage and of friendly alliance proved a failure.

From Jehu to the Captivity of Israel
(II Kings 9-16)

Jehu, a man of impetuous personality (II Kings 9:20), had been designated as king of Israel by both Elijah (I Kings 19:16) and Elisha (II Kings 9:1-10). He came to the throne when the baneful influence of Jezebel had largely neutralized the true religion in both kingdoms, especially in Israel, and he adopted a policy of ruthless extermination of Baalism. He began by slaying the aged Jezebel herself, and then he did away with the other members of the house of Ahab, as well as the priests of Baal, whom he assembled by a subterfuge. Thus Jehu purged the land from her traitors, but at a terrific cost, so that Israel was never again able to cope with her stronger foes. During Jehu's reign of twenty-eight years his kingdom dwindled because of the inroads of Hazael, King of Syria. Jehu

incurred the condemnation of the prophets, because he himself was not loyal to Jehovah, but still he lives in history as the one king of Israel who did most to stop the growth of Baalism.

In the Southern Kingdom, meanwhile, the Davidic succession to the throne had been temporarily broken (II Kings 11), for the only time in her history. When Ahaziah, King of Judah, was slain by Jehu, the throne of Judah was seized by Athaliah, the mother of the dead king, and she ruled for six years. Athaliah was the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, and so she actively promoted the worship of Baal. She began her ignoble reign by exterminating the royal household, but she failed to slay one little prince, Jehoash, who was secreted by his aunt. When little Jehoash was seven years of age the loyal followers of Jehovah, headed by Jehoiada, the high priest, wrested the sceptre from Athaliah, whom the soldiers slew as she cried out, "Treason! Treason!"

Thus began in Judah another long, auspicious reign, under Jehoash. Since he was but a little boy, the power rested largely in the hands of Jehoiada, who instituted various wholesome reforms. As Jehoash grew older he gradually assumed the reins of government, but he carried out the policies of Jehoiada, and the two of them led a popular movement which resulted in the repairing of the Temple. Towards the end of his reign Jehoash purchased immunity from the approaches of Hazael, King of Syria, who threatened to capture Jerusalem. After the death of Jehoiada, the king weakened somewhat in his work of reform, but as a whole his reign was worthy of commendation.

Jehoash was succeeded on the throne of Judah by

his son, Amaziah, a fairly good king, in whose days there was war between Judah and Israel. Here occurs the fable of the thistle (II Kings 14:8; cf. Judges 9:7-21). Amaziah gave way to Uzziah (Azariah), under whom the kingdom enjoyed unusual prosperity, resulting in unprecedented worldliness, as we learn from the eighth century prophets. The latter portion of this eighth century is the golden age of prophecy, and for an understanding of the period one must turn often to the writings of the prophets, especially Amos, Hosea and Isaiah.

During the latter part of Uzziah's reign he was a leper, and so the active king was his son Jotham. Both Uzziah and Jotham rank among the better kings of Judah, but Ahaz, Jotham's son, who succeeded him, was one of the weak kings of Judah (II Kings 16). For example, his craven attitude towards Rezin and Pekah, the confederate kings of Syria and Israel, caused great grief to Isaiah (Isa. 7). Disregarding the protests of the prophet, Ahaz besought the protection of Tiglath-Pileser III., King of Assyria, that mighty power which was soon to swallow up the Northern Kingdom, and long to remain a menace to the Southern.

During the time of Uzziah and Jotham in Judah, Jeroboam II. was on the throne of Israel. He was the great-grandson of Jehu, and was perhaps the strongest of the kings of Israel. He ruled forty-one years in Samaria, and under his aggressive leadership the land enjoyed a season of "Indian summer," with the greatest prosperity in her history, and likewise with the greatest worldliness, as we learn from the Prophet Amos. Jeroboam II. walked in the sinful ways of Jeroboam I., and so his people suffered. At his death

the sceptre passed to his son, Zechariah, a colourless king, who ruled but six months, thus completing the fifth dynasty, which was the last of any importance in Israel.

After Jeroboam II. the Northern Kingdom rapidly disintegrated under a succession of five miscellaneous rulers, who represented four different dynasties—if it be proper to dignify them as dynasties. These five kings ruled in all but eighteen years, which were characterized by bloodshed and anarchy, with increasing moral decadence, as reflected in the prophecies of Hosea. Externally, these same years witnessed the growing domination of Assyria, according to the repeated warnings of the Prophets. In fact, we have come now to the beginnings of the Captivity.

The Captivity of Israel (II Kings 17)

The Captivity of the Northern Tribes was a somewhat gradual process, rather than a single event, and while it is not always easy to trace the course of these cumulative disasters, certain facts seem clear. About 738 B. C., Menahem, King of Israel, had paid a heavy tribute (II Kings 15:19) to Pul, King of Assyria, who has been identified as Tiglath-Pileser III. When Menahem died the throne passed to his son, Pekahiah, who was soon murdered by his general, Pekah. Pekah then seized the throne and entered into a foolhardy military alliance with Rezin, King of Syria. Hence Tiglath-Pileser conquered the two upstart kings, in 734 B. C., and placed on the throne of Israel his Hebrew vassal, Hoshea.

A few years later Tiglath-Pileser died, and then Hoshea made a mad endeavour to escape from the

clutches of Assyria, by forming an alliance with the King of Egypt. The new King of Assyria, Shalmaneser IV., came to complete the subjugation of troublesome little Israel. This final campaign, begun by Shalmaneser, was consummated by his successor, Sargon II., in 722, when the Assyrian hosts captured Samaria and carried away captive 27,290 of the leading citizens of Israel. This date, 722, is one of the most important in Hebrew history, for it marks the final downfall of the Northern Kingdom.

The Ten Tribes never returned from the Captivity, but still there is no historical basis for speculations concerning the "Lost Tribes." The Assyrians left in Israel certain of her people, and added to them captives deported from other conquered states. These colonists intermarried with the Israelites, and their descendants became known as the Samaritans, about a hundred of whom survive today in Nablus, which is the modern name for Shechem. Those that lived on in Israel, therefore, were lost by absorption, and so were those who were carried away to Babylon—somewhat as an Oriental river is lost when it is absorbed in the sands of the desert. Such was the normal result of captivity in ancient days, for among all the peoples who were deported at about that same time, practically the only one which survived and returned to its native heath was Judah.

The causes of the Captivity of Israel were both political and religious. Among the political causes were the Disruption, which left Israel too weak to stand alone; the alliances with surrounding nations, each of which exacted its toll; and, worst of all, the character of her kings, not a one of whom received the commen-

dation of the prophets of Jehovah. Omri and Jeroboam II. seem to have been the strongest kings of Israel, with Ahab and Jehu practically the only others worthy of note; but if these were the best, or rather, the least bad, what can one say for the rest?

A kindred cause was the instability of the throne: during two hundred and fifteen years there were in Israel nineteen different rulers, representing nine different dynasties, only two of which deserved the name; whereas during a much longer period (three hundred and fifty years) there were in Judah only nineteen kings (not including Athaliah), and there was but a single dynasty. Of the nineteen kings of Israel, ten suffered violent death, usually at the hands of assassins, who usurped the throne; whereas most of the kings of Judah are said to have "slept" with their fathers.

The prime causes of the Captivity, however, were moral and spiritual. The kings, without exception, set low moral standards for the people, and the prophets were almost powerless to curb the prevailing worldliness. People who worshipped Jehovah at all worshipped Him in forbidden ways, and many worshipped imported gods, especially Baal. Hence their lives were increasingly corrupt, as we learn from Amos and Hosea. Long before 722, therefore, the people of Israel were ripe for destruction; or rather, according to Amos, they were rotten.

The History of the Surviving Kingdom
(II Kings 18-25)

Thus far the Book of Kings has centred our interest on Israel, but the history of Judah is vastly more important, for Judah alone survived, and at last gave the

Lord Jesus to the world. Hence the closing chapters in Kings are devoted exclusively to Judah.

When Israel fell in 722, the King of Judah was Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz. Unlike his father, Hezekiah was one of the best kings of Judah (II Kings 18). He was a man of personal piety and of exemplary life, and he became notable as a reformer. He began by purifying public worship in Jerusalem, and by abolishing the high places throughout the land. He ordered the destruction of the Brazen Serpent (Num. 21:6-9), which seems to have become a sort of fetish. He was likewise a patron of literature (Prov. 25:1), as well as a shrewd, far-sighted administrator of public affairs, largely because he had as his adviser and friend the Prophet Isaiah.

But even Hezekiah committed serious blunders, especially in his conduct of foreign affairs, in which he did not always adopt the counsels of Isaiah. During these troublous times the prophet devoted his energies largely to guiding his fatherland in her delicate relations with Assyria. In the days of Ahaz, for example, Isaiah had vainly pleaded with the king to keep free from entangling alliances, but after Ahaz had needlessly courted the overlordship of Assyria, the prophet kept pleading for continued submission. Especially did he warn Hezekiah against making counter-alliances with Egypt, or with the rising power in Babylon. But at length Hezekiah thought that he saw an opportunity to throw off the hated yoke, and so he joined with neighbouring states, abetted by Egypt, in a confederation against Assyria.

The occasion of this widespread uprising against Assyria was the death of her king, Sargon II., who was

succeeded by Sennacherib. The new King of Assyria was faced by insurrections on various sides, and he was forced to prove by arms his right to rule. But he quickly quelled the revolt under Hezekiah and his allies, and he imposed on the King of Judah a staggering reprisal, thus compelling him to strip the gold from the Temple and from his own palace (II Kings 18:14-16). By such abject submission Hezekiah purchased temporary immunity, but ere long the spokesman of Assyria appeared at Jerusalem and demanded her surrender. The king and his people were in a panic, but the Prophet Isaiah, who had previously counseled submission, now bade Hezekiah be at peace, for the city was about to be delivered by Jehovah, without injury or loss.

This amazing prediction was literally fulfilled. While Sennacherib was besieging other cities nearby he sent to Jerusalem his general, Rabshakeh, who insolently demanded the surrender of the city; and when that was refused, because of Isaiah's insistence, Sennacherib sent an insulting letter, which Hezekiah laid before the Lord in the Temple, where he received the promise of deliverance, without the striking of a blow. Before Sennacherib and his hosts had reached the city, that deliverance came, in the form of a plague which decimated his ranks and caused him to return home in haste. Hence Judah was spared for another century and more, but still she did not repent. This deliverance in 701 B. C. is one of three such epoch-making events in Hebrew history, the other two being the deliverance from Egypt and the return from the Exile.

The record concerning Hezekiah closes with the account of two incidents which occurred before this

miraculous deliverance. At one time he was suffering from a carbuncle, and Isaiah told him to set his house in order, for he should surely die; but Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed so earnestly that the Lord gave him fourteen years more of life, and confirmed the promise by turning the shadow backward on the palace steps, which seem to have been used as a sort of sun-dial.

Soon afterwards Hezekiah received an embassy from Merodach-Baladan, King of Babylon, the rising power in the East. That king professed to be concerned about Hezekiah's health, but really he was striving to secure Judah's help in a coalition against Assyria. Hezekiah foolishly showed the embassy all that was in his house, and so he merited the rebuke of Isaiah, who had insisted that his king do nothing to incur the displeasure of Assyria. Then the prophet told the king that the inhabitants of Jerusalem, as well as her costly treasures, would some day be carried away to Babylon. Hitherto the menace to Judah had been from Assyria, which had taken Israel into bondage, but the prophet saw that the destruction of Jerusalem would be wrought by the hands of Babylon.

At the death of Hezekiah, about 697 B. C., he was succeeded by his son Manasseh, a lad of twelve, who gained the odium of being the worst of Judah's kings (II Kings 21). He repressed the pure worship of Jehovah, which his father had restored, and he encouraged the foulest Canaanitish rites. He strove to win favour with surrounding peoples by importing their cults, including the worship of the stars, as practiced in Assyria. Manasseh permitted lewd women to ply their traffic in the Temple, as the "temple priestesses"

do in India today; and he offered his son as a living sacrifice. He is supposed to have sawed Isaiah asunder, and he was the bitter enemy of all the prophets, especially Jeremiah.

Manasseh reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years, and then he gave way to Amon, his son. Amon reigned two years, and was almost as vile as his father, but Amon's son, Josiah, was one of the best kings of Judah. He began to reign when eight years old, and he became active in reform while still a young man (II Kings 22). He commissioned Shaphan, the scribe, Hilkiyah, the priest, and others to repair the Temple, and in it Hilkiyah discovered the Book of the Law, which seems to have been the same as our Book of Deuteronomy. When Shaphan read this roll to Josiah, the king ascertained through Huldah, the prophetess, that the writing was genuine, and then he began to put its teachings into effect.

First of all, Josiah assembled in the Temple the elders of the land, and he read to them the words of the Law. Then he made a solemn covenant that he as king would be true to this revealed will of Jehovah, and all of the people bore him witness. So he cleansed the Temple, burning the paraphernalia employed in the worship of Baal; putting down the priests of Baal; destroying the houses of the sodomites; defiling the places where men had sacrificed their children to strange gods; and otherwise restoring the worship of Jehovah in its primitive simplicity. Such a catalogue of abuses to be corrected reveals the unspeakable depths to which Judah had fallen under Manasseh and Amon.

Not content with such negative reforms, Josiah com-

manded the people to observe the Passover, and the resulting celebration was the most memorable in their history. Thus Judah was committed once more to the worship and service of Jehovah. The king's goodness and zeal permitted the land to enjoy a brief season of "Indian summer." "Like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to Jehovah with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to the Law of Moses; neither after him arose any like him" (II Kings 23:25).

The death of Josiah was sad. In 608 B. C. he went out to oppose Necho, King of Egypt, who was engaged in a campaign against Assyria. At the famous old battlefield of Megiddo (Armageddon) Josiah was slain, and then the throne of Judah passed from one weakling to another. First came Josiah's son, Jehoahaz, who reigned but three months, when he gave way to his brother, Jehoiakim, who was the puppet of the King of Egypt. Both of these sons of Josiah were unworthy. Jehoiakim, for instance, was the king who cut the roll and burned it in the brazier, because he did not like the writing (Jer. 36).

Meanwhile the power of Babylon had been gradually ascending, so that about 606 she overcame Assyria, and a little later, Egypt. Thus Babylon gained practical sovereignty over Judah, but Jehoiakim, instead of quietly submitting to the new régime—as Jeremiah implored him to do—chafed under it so much that he rebelled, and was subdued. Under his son, Jehoiachin, came the "First Captivity," for the captivity of Judah, as of Israel, was a gradual process.

In 597 B. C., after ruling only three months ineffectually, young Jehoiachin was carried captive to

Babylon, together with the flower of the kingdom, ten thousand in all, including seven thousand warriors and one thousand artisans, so that only the poorest people remained in Jerusalem. The King of Babylon then placed on the throne of Judah, Zedekiah, the son of Josiah and the uncle of Jehoiachin. Zedekiah ruled eleven years, but he proved weak and pliable in the hands of short-sighted advisers, who stood out against Jeremiah in his endeavours to avert an open break with Babylon. At last Zedekiah ceased his vacillating policy and joined with neighbouring provinces in seeking the aid of Egypt for a revolt against Babylon. Thus he sealed his nation's doom.

Nebuchadrezzar, King of Babylon, came at once and invested Jerusalem for more than a year, causing increasing famine, so that in 586 B. C. the city surrendered. Zedekiah's sons were slain in his presence, and his own eyes were put out; then he was carried away to Babylon, with the residue of his people, leaving only the poorest to be vine-dressers and husbandmen. The Temple was burned, as well as the king's palace and the other great houses, and the walls of the city were destroyed. The record here stresses most the stripping of the Temple. The aim of the conquerors was to break the spirit of the Jewish people, and thus to render impossible any further uprisings in Jerusalem.

The causes of the Captivity of Judah were like those in Israel: the Disruption, which weakened the land; idolatry, which resulted in immorality; the moral weakness of many of the kings; dependence on diplomacy rather than on God; allegiance with foreign powers, and a shifting policy which alienated the mightiest of them; consequent intermeddling by these powers in the in-

ternal administration of Judah; and, worst of all, persistent disregard of the will of God, as revealed through His prophets. The underlying cause of the Captivity, therefore, was disloyalty to the Covenant with Jehovah.

Suggestions for Review and for Discussion

1. Estimate the strength and the weakness of Solomon.
2. State the causes of the Disruption.
3. Compare the strength of Israel and of Judah.
4. Characterize the three periods after the Disruption.
5. Account for the stability of the House of David.
6. Name four strong kings of Israel.
7. Name the chief prophets in Israel; in Judah.
8. Name eight good kings of Judah after 933 B. C.
9. Compare Jezebel with Athaliah; Elijah with Elisha.
10. Account for the survival of Judah.

Note.—See the questions under Genesis (p. 32).

Memorable Chapters: I Kings 3, 8, 12, 18, 21; II Kings 2, 5, 19, 22, 25.

XI

CHRONICLES: THE RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF JUDAH

THESE two books, which were originally one, afford an interesting way to review Hebrew history, by glancing at the genealogies from Adam to David, and then concentrating on the history of the House of David until the beginning of the Exile. First Chronicles corresponds to Second Samuel; and Second Chronicles, to First and Second Kings. The purpose of the Chronicles, however, differs from that of those other books, and so does the subject matter.

The modern tendency is to disparage the Chronicles, but the better way is to ascertain the purpose of these sacred writings, and then to use them as they were intended. They afford a history of the Southern Kingdom, rather than of the Northern, which is more prominent in the Book of Kings. The Chronicler introduces Israel only when necessary to throw light upon the course of events in Judah; otherwise he devotes himself to the abiding elements in the history of the Kingdom which survived after the Captivity.

The Chronicler gives much space to genealogies, not for their own sake, but to illustrate the divine election of the House of David. These genealogies are not intended for devotional reading, but rather for reference. In like manner the Chronicler attaches much impor-

tance to numbers, as practical demonstrations of the power and the glory of God. Here, then, is an inspired homiletic treatment of the history of Judah, containing many a memorable sentence.

In tracing the history of the Southern Kingdom, Chronicles fixes attention upon the House of David, because of the Messianic promise; and in dealing with the various kings of Judah, the emphasis is largely upon their abiding religious significance. Especially is this true of David and of Solomon, whose serious faults receive scant mention here, whereas their ecclesiastical contributions, especially in planning and in erecting the Temple, are given great prominence.

Throughout the Chronicles matters relating to public worship assume increased importance. The Temple and the priests, as well as the Levites, are much more prominent than in Samuel and in Kings. Ecclesiastical organization is more in evidence, and the externals of religion tend to become more prominent. The prophets, too, appear more frequently as the friends and advisers of the kings of Judah. In all of this there is no lack of essential harmony between the Chronicles and the other historical books; there is rather a supplementary treatment of the same broad facts from a different point of view, as in the Fourth Gospel in contrast with the other three. As pure history Chronicles is less valuable than Samuel or Kings, but as a religious interpretation of Hebrew history, these writings, too, are worthy of their place in the Bible.

As an example of this different emphasis, Chronicles relates much about sacred music. The Hebrews were always lovers of music, though they excelled in no other fine art, unless we include writing and public

speaking. They sang at their daily work, and they made much of music in their worship, for their religion was largely one of joy. Their musical activity, however, dates largely from the times of David, who fostered an interest in both instrumental and vocal music. In practically every revival of religion in Old Testament times, as under Hezekiah, there was a renewal of interest in music.

The organization of religious music yonder, as reflected in the Chronicles, was somewhat like that in the modern Church, with orchestras of trained musicians, and choirs of trained singers, in certain cases larger than we have today. These bodies had skilled leaders, who were likewise their instructors, so that the music might be rendered in a manner acceptable to God. Here is an attractive opportunity for Bible study: the place of music in the Hebrew religion.

In these various ways Chronicles stresses the religious rather than the secular history of Judah. The Kingdom as such was not to emerge from the Exile, but the Church was to live on, and at last it was to bring forth the promised Messiah. Instead of looking back, therefore, Chronicles looks forward, leading up naturally to the Restoration, about which we learn much from Ezra and Nehemiah. But before we turn to these later books, we ought to consider briefly the significance of the Exile.

The Meaning of the Exile

The Exile, to the beginning of which both the Kings and the Chronicles lead us, was a historic process, but for convenience we speak of it as a single event, "a second and greater Exodus," "the most remarkable

event in human history" (McCurdy). The Exile lasted seventy years, as Jeremiah had predicted (Jer. 25:11, 12 and 29:10). This period may be variously estimated, for just as there were at least two distinct captivities of Judah, so there were at least three distinct returns. Perhaps the best way is to count from the final Captivity, about 586, to the completion of the Temple, about 516. The number seventy here symbolizes completeness; for the Jews spent two generations in captivity, and few of those deported were living at the time of the return.

These seventy years witnessed more stupendous changes than any similar period in the history of God's people. These changes were of two sorts, social and religious, of which the religious were the more important. The Hebrew people were born for religion, and they seem to have found themselves during the Exile. Like Job, they were stripped of practically everything except their faith in God, and yet they emerged from the Exile with increased spirituality (cf. Rom. 8:28).

Beginning with the Exile, the Hebrew Nation gave way to the Hebrew Church, so that this period may be called the "birthday of the Church." From this point of view, which is that of the Bible, "The destruction of the State was the greatest step towards Christianity, after the Exodus" (A. B. Davidson). These sad experiences gave spiritually-minded Jews a stronger and clearer belief in God, and therefore a surer confidence in the fulfilment of prophecy, in which they were to be His chosen agents. So the Exile confirmed the Jewish people in their high calling as a "peculiar people," and it prepared them more fitly to bring forth the promised Messiah.

The change in religious customs was likewise notable. Throughout their previous history the Hebrews had been tempted to idolatry; but while they were in Babylon, instead of yielding to the prevailing contagion, they somehow became immune; and throughout their later history, idolatry ceased to be one of their besetting sins. For much the same reasons, the various sorts of impurity which accompany idolatry practically ceased to appeal to the Jews.

During the Exile, too, they learned to appreciate the Sabbath; they attached a new importance to the teaching of religion, and they seem to have founded the synagogue, as a substitute for the Temple. The difference between the two is that there was but one Temple, whereas there came to be many synagogues; the Temple was primarily for sacrificial worship, whereas the synagogue was for religious teaching and for social worship without sacrifices. In various ways, therefore, the synagogue as well as the Temple prepared for the Christian Church.

During the Exile two contrasting tendencies were closely allied: religion began to take more account of both "the world and the individual." There was a broadening of the horizon of the saints, with a gradual "transition from a national to a world religion." All of this had been implicit in the faith from its beginning, but during the Exile the people of God became more conscious of their world-wide mission. At the same time there was an increasing emphasis upon the individual, who assumed a prominent place in the teachings of Jeremiah, and still more so in Ezekiel. For example, there was more stress upon the fact of personal immortality. The only religion, after all, which can

be universal is the one which makes much of the individual.

During the Exile there was increased literary activity, which was almost wholly religious. After the history of the nation had been closed, there was a new incentive to preserve the records of the past. Since the priests were no longer able to officiate in the Temple, they had more leisure for writing out the history of their people. It would be difficult to make an accurate list of the sacred writings which come down to us from the Exile, but it is certain that this period was one of the most productive in Hebrew history. For example, it seems to have marked the beginnings of apocalyptic literature.

So much for the religious changes wrought by the Exile! The social changes were less important, but no less interesting. These changes are reflected in the very name of God's people, who are known henceforth as Jews. They alone, out of a score of smaller nations carried into captivity in Mesopotamia, survived as a separate people and returned to their homeland. Such social vitality has always been characteristic of the Jewish people, and it is due largely to their religion.

Their experiences in Babylon seem to have been less rigorous than we often suppose. They endured no such hardships, for example, as their fathers had suffered in Egypt. Many of the exiles in Babylon built and occupied their own houses; they maintained servants, and they engaged freely in business. A few of them, such as Daniel and Nehemiah, rose to the highest positions in the government. The "bondage," then, was largely nominal.

Partly because of such freedom, the Jews in Baby-

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lon began to be a commercial rather than an agricultural people. During their previous history they had been largely a rural people, tending their flocks and herds, as well as their vineyards and olive groves, but from this time on they developed commercial interests, and so they lived increasingly in towns and cities. The Jews of today are almost never farmers, partly because their forbears changed their habits of life during the Exile.

On the whole, therefore, the Exile was a means of blessing to God's people, and through them to the world. It had been occasioned by their disloyalty to God, but it did not mean that they had entirely forfeited His favour. Here, then, is an opportunity for a study of divine providence: the same God Who had called the Hebrews out of their bondage in Egypt was waiting to call the Jews out of their captivity in Babylon.

Suggestions for Review and for Discussion

1. Contrast Chronicles and Kings.
2. Discuss the value of church statistics.
3. What is the purpose of public worship?
4. Discuss the place of music in religion.
5. Make a list of memorable passages in Chronicles.
6. State the wholesome effects of the Exile.

XII

EZRA AND NEHEMIAH: THE RETURN FROM EXILE

THE return from the Exile was really a process, with several stages: the first return, under Zerubbabel, took place about 537 B. C.; the second, under Ezra, about 458; the third, under Neemiah, about 445; and one might count a fourth, under Nehemiah, about 434 (Neh. 13:6). Our information about these various returns is derived almost exclusively from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, each of which appears to have been composed by the man whose name it bears. The Book of Nehemiah is notable for its literary style, and both of them are invaluable because of the light which they throw upon this important period in the history of the Jews.

The simplest way to study these books would be to watch the contrasting personalities of these two men, who constituted almost an ideal team. But historically the events which they narrate fall into three groups, corresponding somewhat to the three returns mentioned above. The Book of Ezra deals with the first and the second of these returns,—but in a different manner. In writing about the events connected with the first return, Ezra is simply a chronicler of past history, but in dealing with the second return, he is speaking as an eye-witness, and as the chief actor. The Book of

Nehemiah has to do with the events following the third return—the period in which Nehemiah and Ezra rendered their dual service for the Kingdom.

The first six chapters of Ezra, therefore, deal with events connected with the first return, in which the principal characters were Zerubbabel, representing the House of David, and Jeshua, the high priest. This return was made possible by the proclamation of Cyrus the Great, founder of the Persian Empire, who had captured Babylon and had thus become the mightiest force in his world. In this proclamation (Ezra 1) Cyrus acknowledged Jehovah, the God of the Jews, and gave his consent for all of them that wished to do so to return to their homeland. He likewise decreed that those who tarried in Babylon should aid their returning brethren with gifts of gold and other things needful in rebuilding Jerusalem and the Temple, and he restored the vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from the House of God. In all of this Cyrus was fulfilling the predictions of Isaiah (44:28 and 45:1).

The entire number of those who returned was 42,360, not including servants. The leaders among them gave liberally for the rehabilitation of Jerusalem, and especially for the rebuilding of the Temple. At the time of the Feast of Tabernacles the priests began to offer the regular sacrifices, according to the Law of Moses, and at the laying of the foundations of the Temple the priests and the Levites conducted musical services, so that the older men, who had seen the Temple of Solomon, wept for sadness, whereas many of the others shouted for joy.

Meanwhile the Samaritan adversaries who dwelt

nearby were dismayed because Jerusalem and the Temple were being rebuilt, and after vainly endeavouring to join with the Jews in erecting the Temple, these semi-idolatrous worshippers of Jehovah began to intrigue with the Persian Court, claiming that the Jews had always been a rebellious people and that it was unsafe to permit them to proceed with the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Cyrus was no longer on the throne, and so the good work was stopped.

But Haggai and Zechariah, prophets of Jehovah, urged the people to continue to build, and when Tattenai, a governor of Persian provinces nearby, protested against such action, the prophets urged that he request the authorities in Babylon to institute a search in the royal archives for the decree of Cyrus. When the decree was found, King Darius, who was then on the throne, ordered that the work in Jerusalem proceed. So at last, after discouraging delays, the Temple was completed. While it was not so magnificent as the Temple of Solomon, and while the dedicatory ceremonies were not so imposing, still the hearts of God's people were filled with joy. The Temple was dedicated about 516 B. C., or about twenty-two years after the giving of the decree by Cyrus.

All of this was before the time of Ezra, who first appears in connection with the second return, about 458. There is a gap of almost sixty years between the events narrated in the sixth chapter and those in the seventh. Meanwhile the throne of Persia had fallen to Artaxerxes Longimanus, a wise ruler, who became the patron of Ezra and of Nehemiah. The number of those who returned to Jerusalem with Ezra was smaller than in the first return, and since they carried a good

deal of treasure, they were in danger of being waylaid. Ezra was ashamed to ask the king for an armed guard; but he took every possible precaution, and trusted in God to safeguard their journey; so they arrived in Jerusalem unharmed.

This second period (Ezra 7-10) is one of reform rather than of rebuilding. Ezra began by reforming the mixed marriages, for the Jews had intermarried freely with the people of the land, who vastly outnumbered them, so that the Jews were in danger of losing their identity. Ezra assembled all of them that were spiritually minded, and in their presence he prayed to God, confessing the sins of the people and asking God to forgive. After he had convinced these spiritual leaders that the people had greatly sinned, he issued a proclamation requiring all of the Jews to meet in a public assembly. Then he explained to them the enormity of their offence, and they promised to put away their foreign wives.

The Book of Nehemiah

Between the close of the Book of Ezra and the beginning of the Book of Nehemiah there is a gap of several years. This book is an autobiography, and it is more interesting than the other, for it shows Ezra in a pleasing light, and it introduces Nehemiah, one of the most winsome characters in the Old Testament. The return under Nehemiah, about 445 B. C., was largely personal, for he was accompanied by no such throng as that which went with Ezra. The chief interest in the book, however, is in the partnership of these two men with varied talents but with like devotion to God.

Nehemiah was a layman. He was the cup-bearer to King Artaxerxes, and as a rule he was cheerful when in the king's presence. But one day Nehemiah came in with a sad countenance, and when the king inquired about the cause of his sadness, he replied that he was grieving about the plight of his people in Jerusalem, and that he desired permission to visit them, as well as letters from the king to the governors beyond the River (Euphrates), guaranteeing him safe passage and substantial aid in his enterprise. Nehemiah must have stood in favour with Artaxerxes, much as Joseph had with Pharaoh, for the king did more than Nehemiah dared to ask, making him a provincial governor and sending him out with a military escort.

From the very beginning the new governor displayed unusual executive ability. He found that Sanballat and other Samaritans were violently opposed to the restoration of Jerusalem, and he investigated the situation by night in order to ascertain what was needed. Then he began most tactfully to arouse the enthusiasm of the people, assuring them that God would prosper their labours. He assigned them to their respective duties, and in his record he carefully states the accomplishments of every person.

As soon as the work began the adversaries attempted to stop it by ridicule, and failing in that they devised means of attack. But Nehemiah divined their schemes and made such wise, comprehensive plans for the defense of the city that they did not dare to launch their attack. This record (ch. 4) shows the resourcefulness and the faith of the governor, who is an object lesson of what an executive should be.

Meanwhile the people were threatened by dangers

from within. Some of the wealthier Jews were taking advantage of their brethren, and were lending them money on usury, and even enslaving their sons and daughters, in defiance of the Law of God (Lev. 25:35-39). Nehemiah rebuked the offenders, who confessed their fault, and promised to restore what they had taken, and to cease oppressing their brethren. During all of these years Nehemiah himself was setting an example of disinterested service, for, like General Washington in our Revolutionary War, the Jewish governor was serving without compensation and was bearing the expenses of his own establishment, where he kept an open house, both for the Jews and for sojourners in the land.

Despite the continued machinations of the Samaritans (ch. 6), Nehemiah persisted, until at length the walls of the city were completed. Then he set himself, together with Ezra, to accomplish the spiritual rehabilitation of his people. In the seventh month they assembled all of the people, and Ezra read to them from the Law of Moses. The priests and the Levites worked with Ezra and Nehemiah in causing the people to understand the Law of God, which had largely become a dead letter. At first the people wept because of their sins, but Nehemiah, who always took the lead when practical action was required, told them to trust in God and to rejoice.

So the people celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23), which was primarily a festival of joy. Later in the month they assembled once more and united with the Levites in a prayer of confession, imploring the pardon of Jehovah, thanking Him for all of His mercies, and renewing their covenant of loyalty to Him. This

prayer (ch. 9), which may have been composed for the Levites by the governor himself, is almost a model, for the keynote throughout is God. The remainder of the book shows how this practical man of affairs guided the people in applying the Law of God to their everyday living, and especially to their observance of the Sabbath.

Team Work for the Kingdom

Each of these two men in his different way was a practical idealist, with a character notably free from faults and a reputation which was spotless, both in the eyes of the king and of the Jewish people. Each of them was notable for his loyalty to God, for his love of the people, for his mastery of his own type of work, as well as for his perseverance. Each would have summed up his philosophy of life in the characteristic sentence, "The hand of my God was upon me."

These two men, however, differed much in temperament and in ability, else they would scarcely have formed an effective team. Like Moses and Aaron, Luther and Melanchthon, Wesley and Whitefield, these two needed their kindred loyalties and their diverse gifts. Ezra was the student of Scripture, who was able to explain the theory of religion as it applied to the new problems of his day, whereas Nehemiah was the man of affairs, who could guide the people in actually doing the will of God. Happy is that community today which has such a pastor as Ezra and such a mayor as Nehemiah!

Ezra was a priest of high birth. His motto might well hang over every busy pastor's desk: "Ezra had set his heart to seek the law of Jehovah, and to do it, and

to teach in Israel statutes and ordinances" (Ezra 7:10). He was an expository preacher, in the best sense of that term, and he made a profound and lasting impression on the life and thought of his people. He deserves to rank with Moses and one or two others as the responsible author of considerable portions of the Old Testament, and he has been acclaimed by tradition as the maker of the Canon. Surely he deserves to be better known!

The practical achievements of Ezra, however, came largely after the arrival of Nehemiah, whose gifts enabled Ezra to accomplish what he alone could not do. Nehemiah was an organizer and a builder. He was a leader of men, and he was even more notable as a man of prayer. His gifts supplemented those of Ezra, and they two working together brought to Jerusalem an era of blessing.

Suggestions for Review and for Discussion

1. Contrast these two men.
2. Why do we need expository preaching today?
3. Why do we need laymen with organizing ability?
4. Discuss the prayer life of Nehemiah.
5. What is essential to good team work?
6. Make a list of memorable passages in these two books.

XIII

ESTHER: A RELIGION OF COURAGE

THIS is the best told story in the Bible, according to the late Professor Alphonso Smith, who was a master of literary criticism. As a story it is notable for its characters and for their conversations, and for the dramatic contrasts between the two edicts, between the two banquets, as well as between Haman's haughty spirit and his ignominious fall. Such dramatic artistry is far removed from the pastoral simplicity of the Book of Ruth.

The Book of Esther is even more valuable because of the information which it affords concerning life at the Court of Persia in the days of Xerxes, who appears in this book under the name Ahasuerus. King Xerxes ruled in Susa the palace about 486-466 B. C., so that chronologically this book falls between the first and the second returns. The character of Ahasuerus as here portrayed accords with what is told of Xerxes by secular historians, who picture him as vain, capricious and cruel. Herodotus, for example, says that after the disastrous campaign by Xerxes against Greece he returned to his harem and dissipated his energies in such revelries as are reflected here in the opening chapter.

The chief value of the book, however, is as an object lesson of divine providence and of human courage. It

is true that the book does not mention the name of God, or allude to His existence; for it mentions the Persian king one hundred eighty-seven times, and God, the Invisible King, not at all! But still the record everywhere takes for granted that God is "standing 'neath the shadow, keeping watch above His own," and it presents as hero and heroine a wise man of middle age and a beautiful young woman, both of whom are loyal to duty because they are loyal to God. Esther's words in dedicating herself to the service of her people, whatever the cost, have justly achieved literary immortality (4:13-16).

The first two chapters tell how this young Jewess became Queen of Persia. The tale begins by recounting the modesty and the courage of Queen Vashti in forfeiting her crown rather than expose her person to the gaze of the drunken Court. This first chapter introduces two diverse elements which characterize the entire book and are typical of life in an ancient palace. The one is feasting and the other is deference to the law. Even "the drinking was according to the law" (1:8)! There is as much about feasting and banqueting in this one book as in all the remainder of the Old Testament, and there is almost a superstitious veneration for the law, right or wrong. These two facts illustrate the luxury of that Oriental Court and likewise its despotism. For example, the reason that is publicly given for deposing Vashti (1:17, 22) is that otherwise her example would weaken the supremacy of husbands in their own homes!

The choice of Esther to succeed Vashti reminds us of the testing of Daniel. The young Jewess was gifted with rare beauty, and she was suddenly elevated from

a lowly station to one of the highest rank, with wealth and ease and everything else which appeals to the heart of a beautiful maiden. But, like Daniel, or Joseph, she did not lose her simplicity of heart and her love for her people. Her experiences are typical of the temptations of the young woman far from home, when she is suddenly lifted to a place in the sun. In this respect her story is little like that of Ruth, but in all essentials her heart loyalty was the same.

Like Ruth, Esther was fortunate in having an older friend and adviser, for as the loyalty of Ruth was due largely to Naomi, so the loyalty of Esther was due largely to Mordecai. Under God he was responsible for her being chosen as queen, and for her wise conduct in the delicate negotiations which led to the overthrow of Haman and to the preservation of the Jewish people. Mordecai was instrumental, meanwhile, in unearthing a plot on the part of two chamberlains to murder the king (2:19-23). Thus he gained favour at the Court, which was later to show him honour in an unexpected way.

The next two chapters explain how Esther's people, the Jews, came into dire peril through the machinations of Haman, who was actuated by growing jealousy of Mordecai, because that Jew would not do obeisance to Haman. Haman was a politician of the worst sort, vindictive and unscrupulous, and to this day he is regarded by the Jews much as Christians regard Judas, and as Americans regard Benedict Arnold. Moved by jealousy against Mordecai, Haman secured from the king a decree (cf. Dan. 6) by which he hoped to cause the extermination of the entire Jewish people. Such wholesale massacres were not so rare in ancient times

as they are with us; for we stood aghast before recent atrocities in the Belgian Congo and in Armenia.

In the face of such impending calamities, Esther's temptation was to do nothing, for she was not known to be a Jewess, and she might have reasoned that she could escape by keeping silent. But Mordecai sent her a stern warning, reminding her that one may sin as much by silence as by speech, and that one may be damned for what one fails to do. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." Esther accepted her kinsman's advice and followed it without question. She might have pleaded that it was not the proper thing to intervene, that it was not the proper time, or that she was not the proper person. But instead she cast her lot in with her people, saying, "If I perish, I perish!" (cf. Dan. 3:17, 18).

The remaining chapters (5-10) tell how this young woman, almost single-handed, coped with mighty Haman, gradually circumventing him, and at length delivering her people from his bloody clutches. Naturally she employed all of her tact, as well as all of her native charms, but ever in a proper way. She worked with an Oriental indirectness which seems strange to us, but which was shrewdly calculated to win the favour of her lord, and to lure on to ruin the enemy of her people. So she invited the king and Haman to be her guests at a private banquet. As a result Haman was more highly pleased with himself than ever before, and he was strengthened in his determination to do away with Mordecai. From this time on the tale shows how Mordecai seems to "shadow" Haman.

The night after the banquet Ahasuerus could not

sleep (cf. Dan. 6:18), and he called for the official records of his reign, doubtless hoping to hear about his own exploits. Thus he was reminded that his life had been spared through the watchfulness of Mordecai, and so the king determined to reward this loyal Jew. By a sort of poetic justice Haman was waiting in the outer court to ask permission to hang Mordecai, and the king asked Haman to outline the most fitting way to bestow honour upon the man who had gained the royal favour. When Haman explained the royal honours which he wished for himself, he was astounded at being told to bestow such honours upon Mordecai!

After the queen's second banquet Haman's intrigues became known to the king, and then Haman himself was hanged on the gallows fifty cubits high which he had built for the hanging of Mordecai. The king should immediately have annulled his infamous decree for the extermination of the Jews, but since the law of the Medes and the Persians altereth not, however infamous it may be, he compromised by granting Esther permission for the Jews to arm and to defend themselves against their foes. The resulting slaughter is a sad commentary upon the cheapness of life in the ancient world, where a proud monarch would sanction needless bloodshed rather than publicly revoke a rash decree.

The book closes with a high estimate of the character and the services of Mordecai, but it rightly bears the name of Esther. Once every year, at the Feast of Purim, the Jews of today read this book in their synagogues, greeting the name of Esther with cheers and that of Haman with hisses, and then they enjoy festivities in their homes. This Feast of Purim was not ap-

pointed by the Law of Moses, but was instituted in the time of Esther to commemorate the deliverance from the hands of Haman. The feast is national rather than religious, and it is a silent witness to the historicity of the events narrated in this dramatic book.

The Incompleteness of Bible History

Thus we have taken up, one by one, the historical books of the Old Testament. For a spiritual interpretation of these same times we should now turn to the Prophets, and for spiritual illumination, to the Poets. But even after such a study we should turn away unsatisfied, for with all of its variety and practical helpfulness, the Old Testament was divinely intended to impress us with a sense of incompleteness. The Old Testament was written to prepare for the coming of Christ, and these historical books were written to show the need for His coming, as well as to trace the religious development of the people through whom He came. These books are of supreme interest and value, therefore, as integral portions of the inspired Book which makes Jesus Christ known as the Son of God and the Saviour of the world.

As Christians, then, we should study Old Testament history in the light which streams upon it from Christ and His Cross. When we find pages black with sin and shame, and other pages red with the blood of God's suffering saints, we should remember what our human nature really is, apart from the grace of God, and how desperately our old world still needs the divine Redeemer.

Such pages show us why the saints of old cried out of their darkness for the coming of Him Who alone is the

Light of the World. "It is God that said—'Light shall shine out of darkness'—Who shined in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels" (II Cor. 4:6, 7). Let us thank God for all earthen vessels which hold for us the heavenly light.

Suggestions for a Final Review

1. Explain "A working knowledge of the English Bible.
2. Of what value is the Old Testament today?
3. Discuss the importance of Bible history.
4. Which historical books are most important? Why?
5. Name four women prominent in Old Testament history; four judges; four priests; four prophets of Israel; four of Judah.
6. Contrast the Northern Kingdom and the Southern.
7. Contrast the fall of Samaria and that of Jerusalem.
8. Make a chart showing the kings of Israel, with length of each reign, and the dynasties; a similar chart for Judah.
9. Discuss the relation between Old Testament history and prophecy.
10. Between the Covenant and the Messiah.
11. Discuss Old Testament chronology, and give five pivotal dates.
12. Make a list of ten memorable chapters in these books.
13. Explain the relation between the Old Testament and the New.
14. Which Bible book will you study next, and how?

KEY VERSE	TIME COVERED	ACTION	LITERARY STYLE	MODERN LESSON
Josh. 1:6 (24:15)	Death of Moses to Death of Joshua	Conquest and Settlement of Canaan	Historical Narrative	Need of Religion in Settling a New Land
Judges 21:25	Death of Joshua to Times of Eli (?)	Rough Times with Mighty Champions	Historical Narrative	Folly of Excessive Individualism
Ruth 1:16-18	Times of the Judges	Founding a Godly Home	Biographical Narrative	Loyalty in Per- sonal Relations
I Saml. 12:22 II Saml. 5:2	Birth of Samuel to David's Old Age	Rise and Progress of the Kingdom	Historical Narrative	"Blessed is the Nation whose God is Jehovah"
I Kings 18:21 II Kings 22:13	Death of David to the Captivity of Judah	Disruption and Later Decline of the Kingdom	Historical Narrative	The Folly of a Nation which Forgets God
I Chron. 17:21 II Chron. 6:14, 15	(Creation to Cap- tivity) Death of Saul to the Cap- tivity of Judah	Ecclesiastical History of Judah	Genealogies; Historical Narrative	Importance of Externals in Religion
Ezra 7:10	Decree of Cyrus to Events after Second Return	Restoration and Reform	Historical and Biographical Narrative	Importance of Expository Preaching
Nehemiah 4:9	Third Return and Events Following	Restoration and Rebuilding	Autobiographical Narrative	Importance of Lay Leadership (Organization)
Esther 4:14	Between the First and Second Returns	Deliverance of Jewish People from Peril	Biographical Narrative (largely)	Loyalty and Courage

COMPARATIVE VIEW OF HISTORICAL BOOKS

APPENDIX

OLD TESTAMENT CHRONOLOGY

THIS entire subject is one of great difficulty, which is due in part to the difference between our modern ways of thinking and those of the ancient Hebrews. We think of any one event as occurring at a definite time before or after the Birth of Christ, which is to us the watershed of history; but the ancient Hebrews did not know when Christ was to be born, and they never selected any other event from which to compute their chronology. They might have reckoned from the Crossing of the Red Sea, from the Giving of the Law, or later, from the Beginning of the Exile, but they did not, doubtless because they were interested in things more vital than chronology.

Those Hebrews were interested in living persons rather than exact periods of time, and in vital religion as the unfolding of the redemptive purposes of God, rather than political history as the orderly succession of dated events. Since their ways are not our ways, it is scarcely possible for us to make their sacred writings conform to our modern ideas about history. And since those writings are inspired, it is well for us as Christians to adapt ourselves to their loftier point of view.

Fortunately, then, it is possible to have a working knowledge of the English Bible without being able to fix every incident definitely in time. However, it is

necessary to understand the relative order of the significant events, and it is well to fix firmly in mind at least a few approximate dates, to serve as landmarks in tracing the history of God's chosen people.

The table below gives a few such pivotal dates, almost every one of which is open to question, and especially those before the times of David. The date for the birth of Abraham, for instance, differs widely from those suggested by certain reputable scholars, and there is a similar variation in the dates suggested by scholars for the times of Moses, but there is practical unanimity, except in detail, concerning the dates after the Disruption, which occurred between 937 and 931 B. C.

- c. 2035 B. C.—The Birth of Abraham.
- c. 1400 B. C.—The Birth of Moses.
- c. 1320 B. C.—The Crossing of the Red Sea.
- c. 1010 B. C.—The Crowning of David at Hebron.
- c. 970 B. C.—The Crowning of Solomon.
- c. 933 B. C.—The Disruption.
- c. 722 B. C.—The Fall of Samaria.
- c. 586 B. C.—The Captivity of Judah.
- c. 538 B. C.—The Edict of Cyrus.
- c. 458 B. C.—The Return under Ezra.
- c. 445 B. C.—The Return under Nehemiah.

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